

SUMMARY

*Rejuvenating Communism*

*The Communist Youth League as a Political Promotion Channel in Post-Mao  
China*

Jérôme Doyon

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
2017



## **ABSTRACT**

# **Rejuvenating Communism : The Communist Youth League as a Political Promotion Channel in Post- Mao China**

Jérôme Doyon

How does the Chinese Party-State renew its political elite and maintain its cohesion in the post-Mao era? This is a key question to understand the evolution of China's political system and still the explanations one can find in the literature are far from satisfactory. Overall, the literature on transformation of the Chinese political elite focuses on the broad outcomes, the fact that since the 1980s officials tend to be younger and more educated, but it falls short in unveiling the mechanisms at play. It gives a limited answer to the elite renewal issue as it leaves politics aside. By focusing on educational levels and technical skills it forgets about the importance of political commitment.

I approach these questions through a unique account of the role played by the Chinese Communist Youth League (CYL) in terms of cadres' recruitment and promotion since the 1980s. Using biographical data and a snowball sample of 92 interviewees I reconstructed the trajectories of CYL cadres. Beyond my focus on the central organization of the CYL in Beijing, I compared the situation of the CYL in the capital cities of two very different provinces and in four universities. Through this mixed methods approach, I could assess the evolution of the CYL as a path to power in post-Mao China. My main findings are as follows:

First, due to post-Cultural Revolution politics and the need for leaders at the time to recruit loyal young cadres, a "sponsored mobility" system was developed to renew the Party-State's elite. College students are recruited and trained through the Party's youth organizations. They are put then on a unique promotion path, which includes specific opportunities and

trainings, and which leads them to leadership position in the Party-State. This contrasts with what happened in the Soviet case in particular. Under Khrushchev (1953-1964), the Soviet elite was renewed through the cooptation of professionals with technical skills rather than by recruiting young cadres who spent their whole career in the Party-State.

Second, through the various steps of the sponsored mobility process, the young recruits develop a specific social role as future officials and transform their social circles. As a result, they cultivate a political commitment to their career in the Party-State and to the survival of the regime. Third, the decentralized nature of the Party-State and its youth organizations make it difficult for the young recruits to establish cohesive groups which could organize against the Party-State itself

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# Notes on Translation, Capitalization and Mandarin

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Unless specified, and besides the names of State's laws and administrations, all translations from French and Chinese to English are the author's.

Besides common rules regarding proper nouns, locales and titles, the names of specific institutions and positions are capitalized. Capitalization occurs only when referring to a single specific institution (for example: *Peking University Student Union*, by opposition to *universities' student unions*) or position (for example: *Central Party Committee General Secretary*, by opposition to *Party secretaries*).

Simplified characters are used for Chinese terms, unless it quotes a source from Taiwan or Hong Kong using traditional characters. To the exception of commonly used nouns, such as *Kuomintang*, the *Pinyin* system is used for the Romanization of Chinese terms.

# Acknowledgement

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This research is the product of my doctoral studies at SciencesPo in Paris and Columbia University in New York. This joint academic experience proved extremely rich for my training as a political scientist. The support and advice provided by two doctoral advisors were key in this respect and I warmly thank them for it. Françoise Mengin has been my advisor since my Master studies in SciencesPo. She has been a particularly patient, supportive, and acute reader. Her advises and critiques proved fundamental to my work. On the Columbia side, Andrew J. Nathan took me under his wing as both his student and teaching assistant. His comments and insights highly influenced my research.

This dissertation is also the product of fourteen months of fieldwork in China, among which nine were spent as a visiting scholar at Tsinghua University in Beijing. Numerous individuals and scholars helped me in my research and fieldwork. I particularly want to thank: Prof. Bai Li and Prof. Mi Shoujiang for their support in Nanjing; Prof. Lü Xiaobo and Prof. Zhang Jian who greatly helped me in defining my research and improving my approach of the field; Prof. Liu Yu and Prof. Zhang Xiaojin who welcomed me in Tsinghua and provided insightful comments; Prof. Zheng Huan, Prof. Wu Qing, and Deng Xiquan who, from within the system, contributed intellectually and practically to this research.

This study was made possible by the financial support of SciencesPo (doctoral contract), the CEFC (fieldwork fellowship), the Chiang-Ching Kuo Foundation (PhD fellowship), the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (PhD fellowship), and the Weatherhead East Asian Institute (summer training grant, Daniel and Marianne Spiegel Fund grant).

Finally, I deeply thank the first readers of this manuscript for their comments and edits: Julia Brouillard, Juliette Galonnier, Paul Caussat, Antoine Hardy, Nathanel Amar, Patrice Doyon, Egor Lazarev, Elizabeth Doyon, Mathieu Serenne, Jérémie Béja, Liu Hanzhan.



## Summary

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### *A - Elite cohesion and renewal in communist regimes*

“The Soviet bureaucracy is like all ruling classes in that it is ready to shut its eyes to the crudest mistakes of its leaders in the sphere of general politics, provided in return they show an unconditional fidelity in the defense of its privileges.”<sup>1</sup> Trotsky depicted in 1936 the Soviet bureaucracy as a clientelist and cohesive elite. Only 14 years after the establishment of the USSR in 1922, the cadres were already pictured as cynical and self-interested rather than ideologically motivated.

In light of this configuration, one is led to wonder how elite cohesion is able to last overtime. Coming back to Trotsky’s quote, how to make sure that a bureaucrat’s personal interests remain in line with the organization’s in an evolving society? Once the revolutionary generation gone (who built strong personal ties during years of military struggle), how do communist regimes maintain unity among a renewed political elite? How do the surviving communist systems manage to attract new recruits and guarantee their lifelong loyalty? These questions are at the heart of my research. They are particularly relevant in investigating evolving communist systems, such as post-Mao China, where the revolutionary ideology no longer functions as a key structuring element and where a liberalized employment market provides young people with many attractive career options beyond the bureaucracy.<sup>2</sup> While

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, trans. Max Eastman (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2004), 206.

<sup>2</sup> On the decreasingly structuring role of ideology, see : Kalpana Misra, *From Post-Maoism to Post-Marxism: The Erosion of Official Ideology in Deng’s China* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Martin K Dimitrov, “Understanding Communist Collapse and Resilience,” in *Why Communism Did Not Collapse: Understanding Authoritarian Regime Resilience in Asia and Europe*, ed. Martin K Dimitrov, 2013, 3–39.

numerous studies have described the flexibility and transformation patterns of communist regimes, the issues of elite renewal and cohesion remain highly understudied.

### 1) The transformation of communist systems

Against the transitology literature, which argued for a necessary and linear evolution of communist regimes towards liberal democracy,<sup>3</sup> Jowitt developed one of the most comprehensive accounts of the transformation of communist party-states.<sup>4</sup> He described three different phases that communist regimes tend to go through overtime in their relationship with society. First, a *transformation* phase, during which the Party takes over and destroys the old order. Second, a *consolidation* phase, which leads to the establishment of a new regime with a new leader and ideology. The *consolidation*, for Jowitt, goes together with a tendency towards isolation of the Party from a threatening society which is controlled through coercion. Third, the Party develops *inclusive* dispositions. It reaches the limits of its domination strategy and progressively integrates itself with the growing plurality of the non-official sectors of society, without losing the monopoly over political decision-making.

For Jowitt, this evolution of the communist party-states implies a transformation of the Party leadership. According to him, the communist Party first switches from recruiting revolutionary cadres – risk-taking leaders capable of attracting political support and who are key for the transformation of the old society – to cultivating apparatchiks. The apparatchiks tend then to isolate themselves from society in order to better control it. This is part of the

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<sup>3</sup> See for example : Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York; Toronto; New York: Free Press ; Maxwell Macmillan Canada ; Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992). For an argumentative criticism of the transitology literature, see: Michel Dobry, “Les voies incertaines de la transitologie : choix stratégiques, séquences historiques, bifurcations et processus de path dependence [Uncertain paths of transitology : strategic choices, historical sequences, bifurcations and path dependence processes],” *Revue française de science politique* 50, no. 4 (2000): 585–614.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Jowitt, “Inclusion and Mobilization in European Leninist Regimes,” *World Politics* 28, no. 01 (1975): 69–96; Kenneth Jowitt, *New World Disorder. the Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

Party's *consolidation* strategy, with the view of maximizing obedience within its ranks.<sup>5</sup> Second, the *inclusive* tendencies of the Party imply both the extension of Party membership to groups previously politically excluded, as well as a professionalization of the Party leadership itself. This professionalization implies "a shift away from command, arbitrary, and dogmatic modes of action and organization, and a move towards leadership, procedural, and empirically oriented modes."<sup>6</sup> While Jowitt underlined interesting patterns which are common across communist regimes, the mechanisms undergirding the transformations of the political elite and allowing it to maintain its cohesion, remain unspecified.

Focusing mainly on the USSR and Eastern European Leninist systems, Jowitt presented the inclusive tendencies of communist regimes as the beginning of the end. According to him, the communist parties base their charismatic legitimacy on a combat tension, directed towards external or internal class enemies and vital to subordinate the elite members' particular interests to the organization's ones. But the inclusion phase implies the progressive end of this combat tension as the Party does not retrench itself from a threatening society anymore, and has officially defeated the internal class enemy. For Jowitt, it becomes hard, without this tension, to guarantee the commitment of the political elite to the Party's general goals. All in all, it leads to a corrupt routinization of the organization and its subsequent decay.<sup>7</sup> Yet, after witnessing the survival of different communist regimes, such as in China or Vietnam,<sup>8</sup> decades after the initiation of reforms characteristic of inclusive tendencies, I argue that Jowitt's deterministic account should be questioned.

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<sup>5</sup> Jowitt, *New World Disorder. the Leninist Extinction*, 89.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Jowitt, "Soviet Neotraditionalism: The Political Corruption of a Leninist Regime," *Soviet Studies* 35, no. 3 (July 1983): 275–97.

<sup>8</sup> Dimitrov, "Understanding Communist Collapse and Resilience."

A more recent study by Jean-François Bayart on what he called “Thermidorian situations,” strikes me as an interesting new take on the inclusive tendencies of communist regimes.<sup>9</sup> Bayart drew a parallel between the contemporary situations that can be observed in different bureaucratized revolutionary regimes and the conservative turn the French Revolution took in 1794 during the month of *Thermidor*,<sup>10</sup> leading to the downfall of Robespierre and the establishment of a new regime, the “Directory” (1795-1799). The concept of “Thermidor” which emerged from these events, has taken various meanings depending on authors’ perspectives. Trotsky, in particular, accused Stalin of embodying the “Soviet Thermidor.”<sup>11</sup> For him, Stalin’s regime exemplified the end of the revolutionary impetus and the “triumph of the bureaucracy over the masses.”<sup>12</sup> He therefore condemned it as the rise of a new ruling class.

Bayart’s concept of Thermidorian situation contrasts with Trotsky’s normative approach and focuses on a different historical configuration, including the bureaucratization of the regime as rules are developed regarding political selection and succession, but also the liberalization of its economic policies, such as in contemporary China or Vietnam, by opposition to central planning under Stalin. Bayart sums it up as follows: “Contemporary “Thermidorism” [...] is found all along revolutionary trajectories, whether communist or other, when the ruling class becomes professionalized, passes from the register of mobilizing utopia to managerial reason, and aims to reproduce itself as a ruling class by resorting to the ambiguous strategy of opening

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<sup>9</sup>Jean-François Bayart, “Le Concept de situation thermidorienne: régimes néo-révolutionnaires et libéralisation économique [The Concept of Thermidorian Situation: Neo-Revolutionary Regimes and Economic Liberalization],” *Questions de recherche* 24 (March 2008): 1–76.

<sup>10</sup> Thermidor was the eleventh month of the revolutionary calendar, used in France from 1793 to 1805.

<sup>11</sup> Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, 66.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

itself up to the capitalist world economy, indulging in the primitive accumulation of capital, and also in perpetuating a revolutionary ideology, vocabulary and *imaginaire*.”<sup>13</sup>

Bayart’s concept shares numerous common features with Jowitt’s inclusive tendencies, but it is also more specific in two main ways. First, it does not merely offer a description of the strategies developed by revolutionary regimes to survive, but identifies a specific *situation*, characterized by the interaction between a social context and the regime’s strategies. The regimes’ strategies are presented as both causes to the evolutions of society and reactions to them. Focusing on the interaction itself allows the author to take a step back from an approach purely focused on the survival of political systems, thereby avoiding a certain determinism. Second, the situation Bayart focused on is different and more specific than the context of the inclusive tendencies developed by Jowitt. While Jowitt had in mind the coming to power of Khrushchev after Stalin and the decades that followed, Bayart used the examples of contemporary Cambodia and Iran to describe the ways in which a revolutionary regime deals with a liberalizing economy and the socioeconomic changes it implies. He described a very different context, in which the revolutionary Party does not rule the economy through central planning nor has a complete control over social mobility anymore. In this context, Bayart stressed the ideological flexibility and overall adaptability of the bureaucratized revolutionary regimes.

The political elites described by Bayart are adapting to a liberalizing socioeconomic context. Using a variety of methods, they try to remain in power by making the most out of the new situation that they contributed to shape. In fact, the concept of Thermidorian situation implies that while the socioeconomic context changes drastically, the political system and its elite

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<sup>13</sup> Bayart, “Le Concept de situation thermidorienne: régimes néo-révolutionnaires et libéralisation économique [The Concept of Thermidorian Situation: Neo-Revolutionary Regimes and Economic Liberalization],” 58. Translated and quoted by: Françoise Mengin, *Fragments of an Unfinished War: Taiwanese Entrepreneurs and the Partition of China* (London: Hurst and Oxford University Press, 2015), 83.

remain largely the same. However, as developed by Andrew Walder, departure from central planning has deep political consequences: it creates alternatives to the reward and career paths formerly controlled by the Party organizations.<sup>14</sup> In the Chinese case for instance, it implied the end of the job placement system managed by the Party-State.<sup>15</sup> In this context, and when new lucrative career opportunities open up, how does the party keep attracting young educated recruits and guarantee their loyalty? Like in Jowitt's work, the mechanisms explaining elite renewal and cohesion, and therefore the sustainability of the regime overtime in a changing context, remain to be explored.

Building on the sociology of elites, I argue that the issue of elite renewal and cohesion, and how it is maintained overtime, must be at the heart of a study of revolutionary regimes' evolutions.<sup>16</sup> I, however, do not study the Party-State's political elite as a homogeneous "ruling class"<sup>17</sup> or "new class".<sup>18</sup> While this approach can yield interesting results in stressing the importance of elite cohesion for regime survival, the focus on the elite's social background and homogeneity often obscures the organizational mechanisms through which it renews itself in light of a changing situation. In line with the approach developed by Suleiman in his study of contemporary French elites, I focus instead on the structures through which the political elite,

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<sup>14</sup> Andrew G Walder, "The Decline of Communist Power: Elements of a Theory of Institutional Change," *Theory and Society* 23, no. 2 (1994): 297–323.

<sup>15</sup> On the direct job placement system and its liberalization, see : Yanjie Bian, "Guanxi and the Allocation of Urban Jobs in China," *China Quarterly*, no. 140 (1994): 971–99.

<sup>16</sup> Elite theory has long emphasized the importance of elite renewal in order to prevent the decline of a ruling elite. The main idea is that a political elite which transforms itself continually, by absorbing talented individuals from other sectors of society, can survive indefinitely (Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class (Elementi Di Scienza Politica)*., trans. Arthur Livingston (New York; London: McGraw-Hill book company, inc., 1939); Vilfredo Pareto, *The Rise and Fall of the Elites; an Application of Theoretical Sociology*. (Totowa, N.J.: Bedminster Press, 1968).

<sup>17</sup> Mosca, *The Ruling Class (Elementi Di Scienza Politica)*.

<sup>18</sup> Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York: Praeger, 1957).

understood as the officials employed by the Party-State, is recruited and trained.<sup>19</sup> While other elite groups might emerge in a Thermidorian situation and the liberalizing economy which goes with it, the ruling elite in a communist regime remains the Party-State officials and this is the group I focus on.

To shed light on the specific mechanisms which allow a revolutionary party to stay in power by renewing its elite and maintaining its cohesion, it appears fruitful to focus on a single case. By opposition to the wide cross-national databases often used in elite studies,<sup>20</sup> it allows to get into the details of the mechanisms allowing elite renewal in a specific setting. post-Mao China offers an ideal setting to study elite renewal in a Thermidorian context. In contrast to Jowitt's statement that "the persistence of Leninist rule in China rests on the continued presence of old Bolsheviks,"<sup>21</sup> the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been able to outlive the revolutionary generation of cadres. The CCP remained in power while pursuing economic reforms characteristic of a Thermidorian situation, as well as promoting a whole new generation of Party cadres.

## 2) The Chinese case

According to Cheng Li, the Chinese Communist party has, since the 1980s, underwent the "most massive, rapid change of elites within any regime in human history."<sup>22</sup> It has been stressed that the CCP implemented a uniquely strict rejuvenation strategy, with no equivalent among other communist regimes, leading to a relatively peaceful elite change at every level of

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<sup>19</sup> On this issue, see : Ezra N Suleiman, *Elites in French Society: The Politics of Survival* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 9–10.

<sup>20</sup> See in particular : Robert D Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976); Joel D Aberbach, Robert D Putnam, and Bert A Rockman, *Bureaucrats and Politicians in Western Democracies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>21</sup> Jowitt, *New World Disorder. the Leninist Extinction*, 314.

<sup>22</sup> Cheng Li, *China's Leaders: The New Generation* (Lanham, [Md.]: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 34.

the Party-State hierarchy.<sup>23</sup> If the uniqueness of the Chinese elite's transformation is often put forward, so far no study has shed light on the specific mechanisms which made it possible.

In line with Jowitt's legacy, the literature on the inclusive tendencies of the Chinese Party-State focuses on the extension of the CCP membership and the ideological innovations allowing it to coopt new elite groups. Bruce Dickson and Kellee Tsai, in particular, analyzed how the cooptation of entrepreneurs by the Chinese Party-State started in the 1980s and was officially recognized in Jiang Zemin's theory of the "three represents" (*sange daibiao*, 三个代表), first introduced in 2000.<sup>24</sup> They both showed that this Party strategy ensured the political support of entrepreneurs by giving them a stake in the regime's survival and preventing them from organizing against it.<sup>25</sup> Dickson showed that while only around 5% of the population was part of the Party in 2000, the proportion of Party members among entrepreneurs was then around 20%.<sup>26</sup> In parallel, the concept of Thermidorian situation has also been applied to the Chinese context in studies by Françoise Mengin, as well as Jean-Louis Rocca. Comparing the evolution of the KMT Regime in Taiwan and of post-Mao PRC, Mengin showed how from a similar revolutionary matrix they both evolved and survived through economic liberalization and elite

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<sup>23</sup> Mingming Shen, "A Policy-Driven Elite Transformation and Its Outcomes a Case Study of the New Local Elites in China." (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1994), 10.

<sup>24</sup> The "three represents" is a political theory introduced by Jiang Zemin in 2000. According to this theory, the CCP "must always represent the requirements for developing China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people" ("Jiang Zemin's Report at the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress," *Xinhua*, November 18, 2002; [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2002-11/18/content\\_633685.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2002-11/18/content_633685.htm), consulted on 2 December 2015). In putting forward the necessity to represent the country's "advanced productive forces" and the "majority of the Chinese people," the theory led to a major shift in the Party's recruitment policy, expanding it to businessmen from the private sector. On the "three represents," see Joseph Fewsmith, "Studying the Three Represents," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 8 (October 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Bruce J Dickson, *Red Capitalists in China the Party, Private Entrepreneurs, and Prospects for Political Change* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Kellee S Tsai, *Capitalism without Democracy: The Private Sector in Contemporary China* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Bruce J Dickson, "Threats to Party Supremacy," *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (2003): 27–35.



bureaucratization.<sup>27</sup> In parallel, Rocca highlighted the evolution of the regime towards state capitalism as well as less references to ideological principles, and the cultivation of a political elite which legitimizes itself through technical expertise.<sup>28</sup>

These different studies have been very informative regarding the CCP's ability to extend its control over a changing society. But focusing on other aspects of the revolutionary regime's transformation, they only briefly touched upon the question of political elite renewal and cohesion. The cooptation of entrepreneurs – who by definition keep their professional status and are not employed by the Party-State – among the CCP's 88 million members,<sup>29</sup> has very little impact on the transformation of the Party-State's political elite, constituted at its core of 500,000 leading cadres.<sup>30</sup> In a structured communist system such as China, the possession of an official position is what defines political elite status.<sup>31</sup> While it is symptomatic of the regime's evolutions, the cooptation of entrepreneurs should therefore not overshadow the evolution of recruitment mechanisms allowing the transformation of the actual ruling elite. In a nutshell, while several studies have noted that, after the revolutionary generation left power, the Party renewed its elite and recruited officials with more diverse experiences, they often fall short in explaining how elite cohesion has been maintained throughout all these years.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Mengin, *Fragments of an Unfinished War: Taiwanese Entrepreneurs and the Partition of China*, 71–146.

<sup>28</sup> Jean-Louis Rocca, *A Sociology of Modern China* (S.I.: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2014), 105–132.

<sup>29</sup> “China's Communist Party Now Larger than the Population of Germany,” *South China Morning Post*, June 30, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> This figure dates from 2013 and includes the leading cadres from the county level up. I develop later in the Introduction the concept of leading cadre. Source: Jean-Pierre Cabestan, *Le système politique chinois: un nouvel équilibre autoritaire [The Chinese political system: a new authoritarian equilibrium]* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2014), 403.

<sup>31</sup> On this issue, see in particular : Hong Yung Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard, “Cadre and Personnel Management in the CPC,” *China: An International Journal* 10, no. 2 (August 2012): 69–83.

<sup>32</sup> On this issue, see in particular : Cheng Li, “Jiang Zemin's Successors: The Rise of the Fourth Generation of Leaders in the PRC,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 161 (March 2000): 1–40; Stéphanie Balme, *Entre soi: l'élite du pouvoir dans la Chine contemporaine [Self-segregation: the power elite in contemporary China]* (Paris: Fayard, 2004), 300; Joseph Fewsmith, “Elite Politics: The Struggle for Normality,” in *China Today, China Tomorrow*:

The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the literature on communist regimes' inclusive strategies by placing the issue of the communist core elite's renewal and cohesion at the center of the picture. Through an analysis of the evolution of the Party's youth organizations since the beginning of the reform era in 1978, I unveil the key mechanisms that allow the Party to remain attractive for young educated recruits and maintain an overall cohesion of the cadre corps, while navigating a liberalizing economy in which it no longer holds a monopoly over social mobility, since alternative valuable career options have become available for ambitious young individuals.

In this introductory chapter, I first review the literature on the recruitment and management of Party-State officials. Second, I introduce the conceptual instruments I intend to apply to the Chinese case in order to fill the gaps in the literature. Third, I explain why focusing on youth organizations and their recruitment function is the best choice to further my theoretical approach. Finally, I put forward three hypotheses regarding the evolution of the youth organization's recruitment function in post-Mao China, and describe the research methods used to test them.

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*Domestic Politics, Economy, and Society*, ed. Joseph Fewsmith (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 149–64.

## ***B - Literature review: beyond formal and informal politics***

The literature on political elites in post-Mao China is divided in two broad categories. A first branch focuses on the Party's institutionalization processes, understood as the routinization of political behaviors along commonly accepted rules and practices.<sup>33</sup> A second branch of research puts forward the limits of this institutionalization and emphasizes the role played by so-called *informal* practices in the selection and promotion of Chinese officials. I now turn to an overview of these two branches and their subdivisions. I decided to endorse the distinction made between *formal* and *informal* politics in my literature review in order to best show how artificial this distinction is. Indeed, these two faces of Chinese politics are far from separated from one another, and I suggest instead that they are fundamentally consubstantial. I argue that we must go beyond the picture of the Chinese Party-State as an imperfect Weberian bureaucracy and take its political features seriously, i.e. what is often seen as *informal*. Finally, I also stress that the best way to do so is by changing our research perspective, giving more weight to the individuals themselves and how they are transformed by, but also transform the organization.

### **1) *Formal* politics in post-Mao China**

#### **a) The limited institutionalization of the Party under Mao**

For analysts focusing on communist regimes' national leaders, China has been depicted until the late 1970s as an outlier in terms of elite renewal and Party institutionalization. While in the USSR and in Eastern Europe younger and better educated cadres were getting promoted, the Chinese revolutionary generation remained in the top Party positions for a very long period

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<sup>33</sup> Regarding this definition of institutionalization see: Steven Levitsky, "Institutionalization and Peronism: The Concept, the Case and the Case for Unpacking the Concept," *Party Politics Party Politics* 4, no. 1 (1998): 77–92.

of time.<sup>34</sup> However, tendencies towards the institutionalization of bureaucratic rules have been noticed at the local level since the 1950s. Oksenberg in particular has shown that, during what he called the *bureaucratic phases* of Mao's era – that occurred in between major political campaigns such as the anti-rightist campaign (1957), the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) or the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) – political recruitment grew more codified and educational background became a more important selection criterion relatively to class background.<sup>35</sup> In the 1960s Vogel examined the regularization of commonly understood standards to evaluate cadres and train them, through a network of party schools.<sup>36</sup> As a result of this process, Barnett argued that in the late 1960s, China's cadre management practices had developed into a system in which performance was more important than personal factors in determining career advancement.<sup>37</sup>

This initial phase of Party institutionalization, which stopped with the Cultural Revolution, can be understood as a transformation of Chinese officials *from revolutionaries to semi-bureaucrats*, to paraphrase Ezra Vogel's title.<sup>38</sup> The Chinese cadre corps gradually became, after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, an organized bureaucracy with a structured ranking and wage system. In 1977, soon after Mao's death, the

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<sup>34</sup> This was also true of the Cuban case. Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*, 201–202.

<sup>35</sup> Michel Oksenberg, "The Institutionalisation of the Chinese Communist Revolution: The Ladder of Success on the Eve of the Cultural Revolution," *The China Quarterly*, no. 36 (1968): 61–92.

<sup>36</sup> Ezra F Vogel, "From Revolutionary to Semi-Bureaucrat: The 'Regularisation' of Cadres," *The China Quarterly* 29 (1967): 36–60.

<sup>37</sup> Arthur Doak Barnett, *Cadres, Bureaucracy, and Political Power in Communist China* (London; New York: Columbia university press, 1967), 45.

<sup>38</sup> Vogel, "From Revolutionary to Semi-Bureaucrat: The 'Regularisation' of Cadres."

number of cadres, understood as the bureaucrats in Party-State administrations but also in public service units and state-owned enterprises, attained 16 million.<sup>39</sup>

### **b) The invention of Weberian bureaucrats in post-Mao China**

After Mao's death and the reforms that followed, a whole branch of literature emerged regarding the institutionalization of cadre recruitment in China. It demonstrated how, starting in 1980 with Deng Xiaoping's call for a "four-way transformation" (*sihua*, 四化), the cadres' corps was transformed through the promotion of individuals who were "revolutionary, younger, more educated, and more technically specialized" (*geminghua, nianqinghua, zhishihua he zhuankehua*, 革命化、年轻化、知识化和专业化).<sup>40</sup> Among the main changes identified were the fact that the CCP stopped relying on class background as a criterion for political selection and that new rules were developed in the 1980s regarding cadres' recruitment, training and promotion.<sup>41</sup> Numerous scholars have explored the effect of these new regulations on Chinese cadres' corps.

Various studies, and in particular Melanie Manion's work, first stressed the role played by new retirement regulations on the transformation of the regime's elite. From ministerial positions downward, new rules regarding retirement age and age limits were promulgated in 1982 for every level. It was the end of the life-tenure system. For instance, the age limit for holding a ministerial level position was put at 65 years old.<sup>42</sup> Parallel to these new rules, some

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<sup>39</sup> Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard, "Management of Party Cadres in China," in *Bringing the Party Back in: How China Is Governed*, ed. Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard and Yongnian Zheng (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004), 60.

<sup>40</sup> Balme, *Entre soi: l'élite du pouvoir dans la Chine contemporaine [Self-segregation: the power elite in contemporary China]*, 170.

<sup>41</sup> On this process, see in particular : Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China*, 193.

<sup>42</sup> Melanie Manion, *Retirement of Revolutionaries in China: Public Policies, Social Norms, Private Interests* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

studies have shown that unwritten norms were gradually established regarding the retirement of national party leaders. At the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1997, an unwritten age limit of 70 was first applied to the election of Politburo members.<sup>43</sup> Several authors stressed how these new rules led to a generational change in the cadre corps.<sup>44</sup> According to national data, the overall ratio of cadres below 35 years old rose from 28,6% to 49,5% between 1979 and 1998.<sup>45</sup>

Beyond retirement regulations, several scholars have examined the role played by emerging rules regarding term limits and step-by-step promotions in making the promotion of Chinese officials more stable and predictable.<sup>46</sup> Finally, the CCP's policy of promoting better educated cadres has been remarked for its impact on elite renewal in post-Mao China. In 1984, 80% of the cadres promoted had a college degree and the ratio of college educated officials at the provincial and central levels grew from 43% in 1980 to 60% in 1986.<sup>47</sup> According to Andrew Walder, such a rapid and fundamental change cannot only be explained by the increase in education at the national level of education. Rather, it indicates a real leadership transformation.<sup>48</sup>

As a whole, these scholars emphasize the impact of these reforms on Chinese cadres'

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<sup>43</sup> Gang Lin, "Leadership Transition, Intra-Party Democracy and Institution Building in China," *Asian Survey* 44, no. 2 (2004): 255–75; Chien-Wen Kou and Xiaowei Zang, "Informal Politics Embedded in Institutional Contexts," in *Choosing China's Leaders*, ed. Chien-Wen Kou and Xiaowei Zang (London; New York: Routledge, 2014), 1–21.

<sup>44</sup> See for example: Shen, "A Policy-Driven Elite Transformation and Its Outcomes a Case Study of the New Local Elites in China," 32; Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China*, 262.

<sup>45</sup> Brødsgaard, "Management of Party Cadres in China," 66.

<sup>46</sup> Kou and Zang, "Informal Politics Embedded in Institutional Contexts"; Brødsgaard, "Management of Party Cadres in China."

<sup>47</sup> Xiaowei Zang, *Elite Dualism and Leadership Selection in China* (London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 61.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew G Walder, "The Party Elite and China's Trajectory of Change," in *The Chinese Communist Party in Reform*, ed. Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard and Yongnian Zheng (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 15–32.

corps, and points to the overall elite renewal process initiated by the CCP. Cheng Li and Lynn White noted that, from 1980 to 1986, more than 1,370,000 cadres recruited before 1949 retired while 469,000 college educated young cadres were appointed above the county level.<sup>49</sup>

The branch of literature regarding the institutionalization of cadres' recruitment and promotion reflects well the major elite change that took place in China from the 1980s onwards. It is also extremely informative about the new rules and procedures that governed this change. Yet, a major weakness of this literature is that by focusing on age and education as meritocratic criteria for the promotion of the new elite, it tends to forget that, from the CCP's point of view, the issue of political reliability remains key. Numerous China experts have in fact argued that, as a result of this rejuvenation policy, the CCP cadre corps took a technocratic turn.<sup>50</sup> Defining a technocrat based on one's university training in applied science, Cheng Li shows that 76% of the CCP Central Committee members were technocrats in 2002.<sup>51</sup> According to Hong Yung Lee, the Chinese officials went from being *revolutionary cadres to Party technocrats*,<sup>52</sup> hence one step beyond Vogel's assessment in 1967.

Indeed, for the institutionalization literature, the CCP is developing meritocratic procedures to recruit its officials, who are progressively turning themselves into apolitical

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<sup>49</sup> Cheng Li and Lynn White, "Elite Transformation and Modern Change in Mainland China and Taiwan: Empirical Data and the Theory of Technocracy," *The China Quarterly* 121 (March 1990): 1–35.

<sup>50</sup> See on the topic of Chinese technocracy: Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China*; Cheng Li, "The Rise of Technocracy: Elite Transformation and Ideological Change in Post-Mao China" (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 1992); Gongqin Xiao, "The Rise of the Technocrats," *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (2003): 60–65; Joseph Fewsmith, *Elite Politics in Contemporary China: Joseph Fewsmith*. (Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe, 2000).

<sup>51</sup> Cheng Li, "The Chinese Communist Party: Recruiting and Controlling the New Elites," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 38, no. 3 (October 2009): 13–33.

<sup>52</sup> Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China*.

Weberian bureaucrats.<sup>53</sup> This assessment has been highly criticized by Andrew Walder, for whom “a rise in emphasis on expertise and professional training does not mean, either logically or in practice, that the scope of political selection criteria is correspondingly diminished.”<sup>54</sup> Walder highlighted that loyalty, though less public, is still fundamental in officials’ recruitment and promotion in post-Mao China. He argued that an “ascriptive” form of political loyalty, based on class background or family ties, has been gradually replaced by a “behavioral” one, referring to the behavior and attitudes individuals display in their work.<sup>55</sup> As demonstrated by Bruce Dickson, the Party constantly tries to find ways to prevent adverse selection in an environment with limited information. According to him, the CCP strives to avoid what happened in Hungary or Taiwan where the cooptation of reformist elements led to a revolution from within and to the ruling Party losing power.<sup>56</sup> Following this idea, a sub-branch of the institutionalization literature has focused on the mechanisms through which the CCP keeps political control over its cadres and ensures that they follow orders.

### **c) The Party’s control over its cadres**

Unsatisfied with the literature presenting the institutionalization of the CCP as a linear path towards meritocracy, several authors have focused on the transformation of cadres’ management since the late 1980s and explored the techniques used by the Party-State to better control its officials. In line with the idea that ideology itself is not a key constraint to cadres’

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<sup>53</sup> For Max Weber, the bureaucrat is in theory apolitical, as “bureaucratic administration means fundamentally domination through knowledge” (Max Weber, *Economy and Society; an Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 225.

<sup>54</sup> Andrew G Walder, “The Political Dimension of Social Mobility in Communist States: China and the Soviet Union,” *Research in Political Sociology* 1 (1985): 103.

<sup>55</sup> Walder, “The Political Dimension of Social Mobility in Communist States: China and the Soviet Union.”

<sup>56</sup> Bruce J Dickson, “Cooptation and Corporatism in China: The Logic of Party Adaptation,” in *China’s Deep Reform: Domestic Politics in Transition*, ed. Lowell Dittmer and Guoli Liu (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 119–43.



behavior, these scholars examine both the maintenance of the overall *nomenklatura* system as well as the reforms aiming at making it more efficient.

As analyzed by Brødsgaard, Burns and Manion in particular, the basis of the Party's control over its cadres is the *nomenklatura* system inherited from the USSR. Party committees at every level have authority over a list of leadership positions. They control the appointment, promotion and dismissal of senior personnel, and the lower level is accountable to the next level up. Parallel to the *nomenklatura*,<sup>57</sup> the *bianzhi* (编织) system delimits the authorized number of personnel in every Party-State administration or public sector units. Whereas the *nomenklatura* is a control tool over the leaders at every level, the *bianzhi* system includes all personnel on the State's payroll.<sup>58</sup>

As stressed by this branch of the literature, the State's control over officials was further standardized through the development of a civil service system from the 1990s onwards.<sup>59</sup> It included more specifically the establishment of a decentralized structure of civil service

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<sup>57</sup> In Chinese: *ganbu zhiwu mingchengbiao* (干部职务名称表).

<sup>58</sup> John P Burns, "Strengthening Central CCP Control of Leadership Selection: The 1990 Nomenklatura," *The China Quarterly*, no. 138 (1994): 458–91; Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard, "Institutional Reform and the Bianzhi System in China," *The China Quarterly*, no. 170 (2002): 345–60; Melanie Manion, "The Cadre Management System, Post-Mao: The Appointment, Promotion, Transfer and Removal of Party and State Leaders," *The China Quarterly*, no. 102 (1985): 203–33.

<sup>59</sup> See in particular : John P Burns and Xiaoqi Wang, "Civil Service Reform in China: Impacts on Civil Servants' Behaviour," *The China Quarterly*, no. 201 (2010): 58–78; Brødsgaard, "Cadre and Personnel Management in the CPC," August 2012, 69–83.

examinations (*gongwuyuan kaoshi*, 公务员考试), starting in 1993.<sup>60</sup> Dedicated exams are now put in place for the specific positions advertised by various central and local administrations.<sup>61</sup>

The civil service system also clarified the dualism between basic official and leaders that transpired from the distinction between the *nomenklatura* and the *bianzhi* system. According to Maria Edin, one of the most important developments of the new civil service system implemented since 1993 is the separation between the management of leading cadres (*lingdao ganbu*, 领导干部) and that of non-leading cadres (*feilingdao ganbu*, 非领导干部). The leading cadres are the highest ranked Party-State figures at every level of the polity, and within public sector units. The distinction between leading and non-leading cadre takes form within a structured ranking system. Leading cadres ranks start at the section leadership level (*keji*, 科级), the equivalent of a township leader or a department director in a county level government, and go all the way to the State leadership level (*guoji*, 国级).<sup>62</sup> The leading cadres are managed through the *nomenklatura* system under the control of the Party's Organization Department. The Party's control is therefore mainly exerted on them. They are also recruited following different procedures than the non-leading cadres who take the civil servant exam.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Following the Temporary regulation regarding civil servants of 1993, a system of civil service exam was implemented ("Temporary Regulation Regarding Civil Servants (*Guojia gongwuyuan zanxing tiaoli*, 国家公务员暂行条例)," State Council, August 1993). The civil servant exam system was further developed by the "Civil Servant Law" of 2005 ("Civil Servant Law of the People's Republic of China (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo gongwuyuan fa*, 中华人民共和国公务员法)," National People's Congress, 27 April 2005).

<sup>61</sup> Regarding the implementation of the civil servant exam, see: Frank N Pieke, *The Good Communist: Elite Training and State Building in Today's China* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 166.

<sup>62</sup> I come back to the ranking of leading cadres in Chapter Two. See: Maria Edin, "State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China: CCP Cadre Management from a Township Perspective," *The China Quarterly* 173 (2003): 35–52; *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>63</sup> Pieke, *The Good Communist: Elite Training and State Building in Today's China*, 166.

According to Brødsgaard, in 1998, 8% of the seven million cadres working in Party-State administrations were leading cadres.<sup>64</sup>

The leading cadres are held responsible for the performance of their unit, on which they are evaluated.<sup>65</sup> The literature on the cadres' management system has stressed the development of precise guidelines to evaluate cadres based on specific performance criteria.<sup>66</sup> Several studies at the county and township levels underlined the Party-State's capacity to maintain control over its agents through a system of evaluation, exams, punishment and rewards.<sup>67</sup> A group of researchers tested this idea statistically and showed that economic performance is now a key factor explaining the promotion of local leading cadres.<sup>68</sup> This view regarding the personnel management capacity of the local Party-State is shared by Pierre Landry who highlighted the importance of cadres control in what he described as a *de facto* decentralized polity.<sup>69</sup> According to Landry: "the party may no longer be the revolutionary instrument of mass mobilization of the Maoist era, its cadres may no longer be strongly committed to its official

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<sup>64</sup> Brødsgaard only included the leading cadres from the county level up (Brødsgaard, "Management of Party Cadres in China," 67).

<sup>65</sup> Edin, "State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China: CCP Cadre Management from a Township Perspective," 38.

<sup>66</sup> Brødsgaard, "Cadre and Personnel Management in the CPC," August 2012; Edin, "State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China: CCP Cadre Management from a Township Perspective."

<sup>67</sup> Edin, "State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China: CCP Cadre Management from a Township Perspective"; Stig Thøgersen, "Frontline Soldiers of the CCP: The Selection of China's Township Leaders," *The China Quarterly*, no. 194 (2008): 414–23; Susan H Whiting, *Power and Wealth in Rural China: The Political Economy of Institutional Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>68</sup> Joseph P.H. Fan et al., "The Visible Hand behind China's Growth," Joint NBER-CUHK Conference on Capitalizing China, 2009 ; S. Philip Hsu and Jih-Wei Shao, "The Rule-Bound Personnel Turnover of China's Provincial Leaders, 1993-2010," in *Choosing China's Leaders*, ed. Chien-Wen Kou and Xiaowei Zang (London ; New York: Routledge, 2014), 97–123.

<sup>69</sup> Pierre F Landry, *Decentralized Authoritarianism in China: The Communist Party's Control of Local Elites in the Post-Mao Era* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

ideology, yet the *institutions* of the party operate as powerful filtering devices that help perpetuate the CCP's political leadership."<sup>70</sup>

Political control is therefore particularly focused on leading cadres. For Edin, contrary to the idea that Chinese officials have become apolitical, it means that the CCP has established a *de facto* separation between two career tracks: a political one for leading cadres and an administrative one for ordinary cadres.<sup>71</sup> Underlining the political feature of leading cadres, Pieke suggested that, in contrast to appointed bureaucrats, they hold positions which would be given to elected officials in an electoral democracy.<sup>72</sup> This idea of a dualistic approach of the Party-State towards its agents, as well as the level of compliance expected from them, is at the core of another sub-branch of the literature regarding Chinese officials, which focuses on *elite dualism* from a quantitative perspective.

#### **d) *Elite dualism and sponsored mobility***

In *the Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, György Konrád and Iván Szelényi argued that in the 1960s and 1970s, East European communist regimes, as well as the USSR, developed a stable compromise between the ruling elite the increasingly influential technocrats. The technocrats agreed not to question the political structure in exchange for policy concessions and incorporation within the decision-making process. The authors argued that communist regimes have established separate career paths, one leading towards political positions with power and privileges and one geared towards more technically specialized positions with less power. These two paths are expected to involve different biases in screening, leaning either

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<sup>70</sup> Landry, *Decentralized Authoritarianism in China: The Communist Party's Control of Local Elites in the Post-Mao Era*, 203.

<sup>71</sup> Maria Edin, "Remaking the Communist Party-State: The Cadre Responsibility System at the Local Level in China," *China: An International Journal* 1, no. 1 (2003): 1–15.

<sup>72</sup> Pieke, *The Good Communist: Elite Training and State Building in Today's China*, 30.

towards education credentials or towards political loyalty. This was particularly salient in Hungary where educated professionals were coopted within the regime but channeled mostly towards technical positions in the State apparatus and rarely placed in political positions within the Party.<sup>73</sup>

In 1995, Andrew Walder took Konrád and Szelényi's idea as a starting point and developed an *elite dualism* model applied to contemporary China. The main argument was that political recruitment had been segmented into two main paths: one leading to more technical positions within the Chinese government, and one ending in more political ones within the CCP. Analysis of career data showed that whereas education level in general, and scientific training in particular, had a positive effect on chances of recruitment, it was stronger for State positions than for Party ones. Political loyalty, measured through Party membership, was by contrast much more important for Party positions than government ones.<sup>74</sup>

Party membership itself being very common among cadres,<sup>75</sup> Li Bobai and Andrew Walder used instead the length of Party membership to account for political loyalty in a later study which refined the elite dualism model. Analyzing a sample of urban residents, they showed that early recruitment in the CCP was crucial for promotion to political positions. In contrast, Party membership obtained in one's mid or late career did not provide career advantages in the bureaucracy.<sup>76</sup> To conceptualize this variation, the authors relied on Turner's

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<sup>73</sup> György Konrád and Iván Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

<sup>74</sup> Andrew G Walder, "Career Mobility and the Communist Political Order," *American Sociological Review* 60, no. 3 (1995): 309–28.

<sup>75</sup> In 1998, more than 95% of the 508,025 leading cadres were CCP members (Brødsgaard, "Management of Party Cadres in China," 67).

<sup>76</sup> Bobai Li and Andrew G Walder, "Career Advancement as Party Patronage: Sponsored Mobility into the Chinese Administrative Elite, 1949-1996," *The American Journal of Sociology* 106, no. 5 (2001): 1371–1408.

concept of *sponsored mobility*.<sup>77</sup> As opposed to a framework in which competition is based on one's abilities, sponsored mobility favors a more controlled selection, in the sense that some individuals are selected early-on for elite status. For Turner, sponsored mobility is a way to cultivate elite values and manners among a set of selected individuals, as well as loyalty to the system. Following this logic, those who joined the CCP early-on became part of a pool of potential candidates for high positions in the organization, by opposition to those who got appointed into the government.

Li Bobai added to this sponsored mobility logic the potential re-training of chosen elite members through adult education. According to him, people who have been selected and have proven their loyalty are re-trained to fulfill the education criteria. This provides both loyal and educated recruits to the CCP.<sup>78</sup> Echoing this importance given to adult education, several studies have stressed the function of communist Party schools regarding elite homogenization and renewal. Frank Pieke has emphasized the transformative value of Party school training on the officials who take part in it. Adult education, he argued, functions as a *rite de passage* to become part of the Party-State's elite. Through Party school training, "the party-state creates a highly specific power cult that turns bureaucratic administrators into an elite who embodies the charisma of the party and its ideology."<sup>79</sup> Departing from Pieke's anthropological approach to the Party school and its focus on elite values, Charlotte Lee statistically assessed the positive effect of Party school training on a cadre's chances of being promoted. Closer to Li Bobai's

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<sup>77</sup> Ralph H. Turner, "Sponsored and Contest Mobility and the School System," *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 6 (December 1960): 855–67.

<sup>78</sup> Bobai Li, "Manufacturing Meritocracy: Adult Education, Career Mobility, and Elite Transformation in Socialist China" (PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 2001).

<sup>79</sup> Pieke, *The Good Communist: Elite Training and State Building in Today's China*, 15.

approach, she described the Party school as a tool for the CCP to screen and train its officials, in order to prepare them for future promotion.<sup>80</sup>

The elite dualism and sponsored mobility frameworks were later applied specifically to the Chinese top political elite. After Walder and Li Bobai's studies based on large samples of urban residents and therefore mostly on lower level officials, Zang Xiaowei used the same elite dualism model to account more closely for the career paths of top political elites, specifically cadres who held deputy provincial governorship or higher positions in the Chinese political hierarchy. He confirmed that education is more important for appointment to State positions than Party ones.<sup>81</sup> Parallel to Edin's point on the separation between a political and an administrative career in the Party-State hierarchy, Zang described this elite dualism as an effect of the increasing functionalization of career paths. According to him, the Party still controls the political decision-making process, but, for the purpose of efficiency and economic development, it delegates administrative power to skilled professionals within the State apparatus.<sup>82</sup>

The elite dualism literature, and its use of the sponsored mobility model, illuminates the diversity of Party-State officials, as well as the Party's strategies to induce elite's values among officials. Yet, while it emphasizes the idea that Party leaders are recruited because of their political loyalty, its appraisal of the issue of loyalty itself is rather shallow. This is particularly problematic in Zang Xiaowei's transposition of the argument to top leaders. Focusing on lower

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<sup>80</sup> Charlotte Ping Lee, "Party Adaptation, Elite Training, and Political Selection in Reform-Era China" (PhD Dissertation, 2010).

<sup>81</sup> Xiaowei Zang, "Elite Transformation and Recruitment in Post-Mao China," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 26, no. 1 (1998): 39–58; Xiaowei Zang, "The Consolidation of Political Technocracy in China: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Central Committees of the CCP," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 15, no. 3 (1999): 101–13; Xiaowei Zang, "University Education, party Seniority, and Elite Recruitment in China," *Social Science Research* 30, no. 1 (2001): 62–75; Xiaowei Zang, *Elite Dualism and Leadership Selection in China* (London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004);

<sup>82</sup> Zang, "Technical Training, Sponsored Mobility, and Functional Differentiation: Elite Formation in China in the Reform Era."

level cadres, Li and Walder had used the length of Party membership as a proxy for loyalty. They showed that a young entry in the Party was crucial to be promoted in the party hierarchy. Using the same proxy, Zang overlooked the fact that, while among local level officials a young entry in the CCP is rare, it is a very common feature among national leaders. Zang did not find any clear variation between State and Party leaders regarding the length of Party membership,<sup>83</sup> stressing that it was not a meaningful way to differentiate career paths in the first place. More broadly, the elite dualism literature shares a major limitation with the broader literature on the CCP's institutionalization: it tends to portray the Chinese Communist party as a holistic actor, with a mind of its own.

#### e) **Beyond the *organizational emperor***

The literature on formal politics in post-Mao China tends to treat the CCP as a monolithic actor, with its own rationality. This is true even beyond the question of cadre management, as reflected in two books written by CCP specialists. In a 2006 piece, David Shambaugh presented the CCP as a holistic organization with its own logic, and capable of both *adaptation* and *atrophy*.<sup>84</sup> Zheng Yongnian, in a 2010 book, anthropomorphized the CCP, describing it as an *organizational emperor*.<sup>85</sup> While this approach allows for a macro understanding of the CCP and its evolutions, by taking the perspective of the organization, it also leaves the actors' perspectives aside, depicting them as mere puppets in the hand of the organization. Following Bourdieu's account, I suggest we could gain analytical leverage by apprehending the Party-State as a *field*, or social arena, within which a variety of actors are

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> David L. Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation* (Washington, D.C.; Berkeley: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>85</sup> Yongnian Zheng, *The Chinese Communist Party as Organizational Emperor: Culture, Reproduction and Transformation*, China Policy Series 12 (London; New York: Routledge, 2010).



fighting or collaborating for their own goals depending on their position. While the field is relatively autonomous and the actors follow common rules, this perspective contrasts greatly with an approach of the CCP as a monolithic entity endowed with a single rationality and purpose.<sup>86</sup>

By focusing on the Party's goals, the different branches of literature I just reviewed disregard the perspective of the cadres themselves, both recruiters and recruits. First, one should question the reasons pushing the recruiters to implement the reforms and promote younger and better educated cadres, who might subsequently become competitors for power positions. Second and more importantly, in a socioeconomic situation in which the economic advantages of cadre status are not as clear as they were in the Mao China,<sup>87</sup> and in which numerous other opportunities exist for these young and educated talents, why would they choose to become officials and remain loyal overtime?<sup>88</sup> The recruits' interests must be analyzed more carefully to tackle these issues. Focusing on *informal politics*, the subfield of the literature that I now turn to investigates the viewpoint of both recruits and recruiters, focusing on the personal relationships binding them and explaining why they would mutually support each other.

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<sup>86</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D Wacquant, *Réponses: pour une anthropologie réflexive [An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology]* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 78.

<sup>87</sup> Burns noted that officials' salaries are comparatively low in post-Mao China, compared to the Mao period but also to other countries. He stressed that this is often partially balanced by corruption and grey income. See: John P Burns, "Civil Service Reform in China," *OECD Journal on Budgeting* 7, no. 1 (2007): 1–25.

<sup>88</sup> On the diversification of social promotion channels and the evolution of officials' economic status, see : Yanjie Bian, "Chinese Social Stratification and Social Mobility," *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 91–116.

## 2) *Informal* politics in post-Mao China

### a) Family ties in post-Mao China

The *informal* politics literature focuses on a variety of personal relationships which exist in parallel to the *formal* Party-State rules and which are presented as having a key effect on the recruitment and cohesion of Chinese political elites. In this literature, *formal* and *informal* refer to two ideal-types of interpersonal links. A collective book on this issue entitled *The Nature of Chinese Politics* has shed light on the debate over the precise implications of these terms, but also on the relative consensus regarding their definition: formal ties derive from the rules of the organization, while informal ties either preexist the relationships established through the organizational hierarchy, such as family ties, or stem from another type of links, such as friendship.<sup>89</sup> Taking the point of view of individual actors, and networks of actors, rather than that of the CCP as an organization, this literature emphasizes the variety of personal interests which govern the recruitment and promotion of cadres in China.

Family ties among officials and the issue of the creation of a new communist aristocracy have been key points of interest within this literature. In particular, the creation of an unofficial hereditary elite would explain why the retiring cadres in the 1980s accepted the reforms, as their children would *de facto* largely inherited their status, which assured elite cohesion. Several studies have underlined the rise of *princelings*, the children of high ranking party and military officials, in the CCP leadership. As put by Stephanie Balme, in the 1980s they were a perfect fit for the new recruiting criteria: educationally, they had been to the best schools; politically, they had often entered the Party at a very young age and could use their parents' connections to gain advancement. According to Balme, the merger of family background and university

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<sup>89</sup> Jonathan Unger, ed., *The Nature of Chinese Politics: From Mao to Jiang* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2002).

diplomas made them both “red” and “expert,”<sup>90</sup> therefore the best candidates for promotion.<sup>91</sup> Balme showed, for instance, that a large number of princelings became secretaries of high ranking officials while their parents were still alive.<sup>92</sup> The position of personal secretary (*mishu*, 秘书) has been largely recognized since the late 1980s as a way to access the highest levels of power.<sup>93</sup> Aristocratic practices were noticed at all levels of the Chinese system. Lü Xiaobo suggested that the practice of *dingti* (顶替), implying the replacement in State-owned enterprises of an old employee by a family member, became very common in the 1970s.<sup>94</sup>

According to Balme, these elitist practices quickly appeared as a double-edged phenomenon for the Party-State. It certainly pleased the incumbent leaders and allowed a peaceful transition to a new generation of leaders, but at the same time it made visible the aristocratic leanings of the Chinese state.<sup>95</sup> Tanner and Feder also emphasized the bad public image of the princelings.<sup>96</sup> According to Balme, the unpopularity of these aristocratic practices seemed to have pushed the CCP’s leaders to find institutional ways to curb them. In 1986, *dingti*

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<sup>90</sup> “Red” refers here to political loyalty. On the debate regarding the being both “red” and “expert” in Mao China, see: Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 8.

<sup>91</sup> Balme, *Entre soi: l’élite du pouvoir dans la Chine contemporaine [Self-segregation: the power elite in contemporary China]*, 160–181.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>93</sup> Wei Li and Lucian W Pye, “The Ubiquitous Role of the Mishu in Chinese Politics,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 132 (1992): 913–36; Xia Li Lollar and Anne Wing Hamilton, “Patronage or Prebendalism? The Mishu/shouzhang Relationship and Corruption in Chinese Politics,” *China Review* 10, no. 1 (2010): 157–82; Wen-Hsuan Tsai and Nicola Dean, “Lifting the Veil of the CCP’s Mishu System: Unrestricted Informal Politics within an Authoritarian Regime,” *The China Journal*, no. 73 (2015): 158–85.

<sup>94</sup> Xiaobo Lü, *Cadres and Corruption: The Organizational Involution of the Chinese Communist Party* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 183.

<sup>95</sup> Balme, *Entre soi: l’élite du pouvoir dans la Chine contemporaine [Self-segregation: the power elite in contemporary China]*, 373.

<sup>96</sup> Murray Scot Tanner and Michael J Feder, “Family Politics, Elite Recruitment, and Succession in Post-Mao China,” *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 30 (1993): 89–119.

was officially forbidden.<sup>97</sup> In 1989, Beijing and other provinces adopted measures preventing high level officials from interfering with appointments and promotions involving their relatives.<sup>98</sup> As a result, cadres without familial connections to the CCP's leadership have been increasingly promoted in the 1990s.<sup>99</sup> Still, a recent statistical study conducted in the 2000s showed that blood ties remain an important criterion for promotion to top political positions<sup>100</sup>.

This literature on family ties among the Chinese elite is valuable in the sense that it helps explain why the older cadres peacefully implemented the reforms which ultimately led to their demise: they were largely replaced by their children. However, its explanatory value is less obvious regarding the princelings' motives. Considering the advantages they held in terms of connections within the State, they could have chosen any professional direction they fancied: why, therefore, did they opt for the political path? As noted by Bourdieu in his study of French elite administrative schools, social background cannot be the sole variable considered to explain one's willingness to pursue an administrative career: even the heirs must be converted to their heritage, through education and rituals.<sup>101</sup>

A parallel argument has been developed by Andrew Walder in his study of the Red Guards in Beijing during the Cultural Revolution. Walder argued against an approach in terms of groups and family backgrounds in order to explain one's political trajectory. His study

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<sup>97</sup> Balme, *Entre soi: l'élite du pouvoir dans la Chine contemporaine [Self-segregation: the power elite in contemporary China]*, 219.

<sup>98</sup> Jae Ho Chung, "The Politics of Prerogatives in Socialism: The Case of Taizidang in China," *Studies in Comparative Communism* 24, no. 1 (1991): 58–76.

<sup>99</sup> Balme, *Entre soi: l'élite du pouvoir dans la Chine contemporaine [Self-segregation: the power elite in contemporary China]*, 301.

<sup>100</sup> Victor Shih, Christophe Adolph, and Mingxing Liu, "Getting Ahead in the Communist Party: Explaining the Advancement of Central Committee Members in China," *The American Political Science Review* 106, no. 1 (February 2012): 166–87.

<sup>101</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *La Noblesse d'Etat: grandes écoles et esprit de corps [The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power]* (Paris: Les Editions de minuit, 1989), 143.

showed that factional cleavages during the Cultural Revolution could not be explained based on these variables. Contrary to the common narratives of the period, the conservative faction was not particularly constituted of the cadres' children, who would have had an interest in the perpetuation of the status quo, and the radicals were not distinctively coming from less advantageous family backgrounds, which would have pushed them to change the system. Instead, these two groups were found in both factions, their alignment depending more on personal encounters and strategic choices at different points in time than supposed preexisting group identities.<sup>102</sup> This analysis should be kept in mind while we tackle the issue of elite renewal and cohesion in China: the effect of supposed preexisting identities, be it social background or else, should not be taken for granted.

### **b) Factionalism in the Chinese polity**

Beyond family ties, the debate over the existence of *informal* political groupings within the Party has been a main feature of the overall literature on Chinese politics. While often in disagreement regarding the type of groupings or their constitutions, many researchers have analyzed the struggles at the top of the CCP since its foundation in 1921. Andrew Nathan, in a seminal article published in 1973, argued for a factional approach towards Chinese politics. According to him, the CCP consisted of different factions, “mobilized on the basis of clientelist ties to engage in politics and consisting of a few, rather than a great many, layers of personnel.”<sup>103</sup> Ensued a debate between Tang Tsou and Andrew Nathan regarding the nature of these factions, or informal groups to use Tang Tsou's more extensive term, and of their relationships to one another. But both of them, and numerous other authors who adopted this

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<sup>102</sup> Andrew G Walder, *Fractured Rebellion the Beijing Red Guard Movement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 12–13.

<sup>103</sup> Andrew J Nathan, “A Factionalism Model for CCP Politics,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 53 (1973): 34–66.

approach, had in common to give a lot of importance to these *informal* factors in political promotion.<sup>104</sup>

Several authors also approached the lower echelons of the Chinese polity through the lens of informal politics. Ben Hillman's 2014 book is a good example of this branch of literature. To best convey the idea that cadres are not necessarily in a constant state of conflict among themselves and are mostly interested in promotion within the hierarchy, he used the term *patronage* rather than faction to qualify the networks of cadres he observed at the county level. He emphasized the role played by these networks in the promotion of local officials, both the ones at the county level and those elected at the lowest level of the Chinese polity. Against the argument made by Maria Edin regarding the Party-State's capacity to control its agents at the local level,<sup>105</sup> Hillman suggested that loyalty to these patronage networks undermines the *nomenklatura* system.<sup>106</sup> Graeme Smith also emphasized the weakening of the local state structures by what he called a "shadow state," constituted of Party leaders and their affiliates and which mirrors the official hierarchy.<sup>107</sup> This overall literature on factions and informal ties is very important as it incites researchers to go beyond the institutions' face value and get into the CCP's internal struggles.

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<sup>104</sup> See in particular on Chinese factionalism: Fewsmith, *Elite Politics in Contemporary China: Joseph Fewsmith*.; Zhiyue Bo, *China's Elite Politics Political Transition and Power Balancing* (Hackensack, N.J.: World Scientific, 2007); Jing Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>105</sup> Edin, "State Capacity and Local Agent Control in China: CCP Cadre Management from a Township Perspective."

<sup>106</sup> Ben Hillman, *Power and Patronage: Local State Networks and Party-State Resilience in Rural China* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014).

<sup>107</sup> Graeme Smith, "Political Machinations in a Rural County," *The China Journal*, no. 62 (2009): 29–59.

### c) **The limits of the *formal* and *informal* dichotomy**

A recent article by Shih et. al. reopened the debate on informal politics in China. Using a database including all the Central Committee members of the CCP from 1921 to 2002, the authors statistically assessed the influence of informal ties on promotion. According to them, the Party leaders promote officials with whom they are personally linked, even if they are less educated or less efficient in their work. While the data they use is impressive in its volume, this study is a good example of the problems this branch of literature faces in separating so-called formal and informal politics. The authors used different measures to proxy for factional ties but overall heavily relied on the idea that cadres who studied in the same university, or worked together, belong to the same faction.<sup>108</sup> A major concern with this measure is that it could also be interpreted in terms of formalized promotion paths, underlining that they were promoted through the same institutional channels. This criticism follows a long standing methodological debate regarding the tendency to overemphasize factionalism in the Chinese system. In 1973, William Parish made a similar argument against a study explaining promotion in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) based on factional ties. According to him, bureaucratic rules should have been taken more seriously into account since they accounted for the promotions better than factionalism.<sup>109</sup>

Beyond this methodological point, the implicit logic behind the informal and formal dichotomy is problematic. The basic idea is that informal practices are resilient traditional behaviors which impede the modernization of the political system. Hence, full-blown institutionalization should eventually make informal ties irrelevant in terms of recruitment and

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<sup>108</sup> Shih, Adolph, and Liu, "Getting Ahead in the Communist Party: Explaining the Advancement of Central Committee Members in China."

<sup>109</sup> William L. Jr Parish, "Factions in Chinese Military Politics," *China Quarterly* 1973 (1973): 667–99.

promotion.<sup>110</sup> Jean-Louis Briquet, in his study of clientelism in Corsica, argued that this view of a linear modernization of politics towards less and less informality stems from an appropriation by the researcher of political actors' narratives. He showed that far from a traditional practice, clientelism is both shaped by the evolution of the political system and shapes it. But to legitimize themselves and claim formal political abilities, politicians publicize a discourse regarding the modernization of politics that contrasts with such practices.<sup>111</sup>

Furthermore, an approach in terms of informal politics is often tainted with culturalism, especially in the Chinese case. Some authors argue that *guanxi* (关系), or interpersonal relationships, are at the foundation of contemporary Chinese politics, due to constant cultural features.<sup>112</sup> However, as stated very clearly by Andrew Walder, the contemporary practices I described cannot be explained by referring to a specific culture: “a cultural tradition cannot explain its own continuity (or lack thereof) without resorting to tautology: the continuity of culture itself must be explained by its relation to institutional structures that serve to perpetuate it.”<sup>113</sup>

Following Lucian Pye, I think that the dichotomy between *formal* and *informal*, which was developed for the study of organizations and administration, is not adequate for the study of politics. While I strongly disagree with Pye's culturalist approach towards Chinese politics, I think his intuitions about politics more broadly are valuable. When he wrote that, due to its

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<sup>110</sup> This logic is for instance made explicit by Huang Jing, for whom factionalism was and continues to be imposed on the CCP by the fact that it is a dictatorship, an only partially modern political system (Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*).

<sup>111</sup> Jean-Louis Briquet, *La tradition en mouvement: clientélisme et politique en Corse [Tradition in motion: clientelism and politics in Corsica]* (Paris: Belin, 1997), 75.

<sup>112</sup> See in particular: Lucian W. Pye, “Factions and the Politics of Guanxi: Paradoxes in Chinese Administrative and Political Behaviour,” *The China Journal*, no. 34 (July 1995): 35–53.

<sup>113</sup> Andrew G Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 10.



specific culture and history, “the ‘informal’ is very nearly the sum total of Chinese politics,”<sup>114</sup> he should have seen that this is a common trait of politics everywhere. He implied it himself when he wrote: “Politics, however, is not administration, and there are no neat boundaries between what might be thought of as official and unofficial politics. When the American president ‘works the phones’ to get critical Congressional votes, or when lobbyists walk the corridors of the Capitol to persuade legislators to support their interests, such activities are just ordinary politics, neither formal nor informal.”<sup>115</sup> Pye’s approach is based on the Weberian distinction between politics and administration. For Weber, while the appointed bureaucrat’s function is to carry out orders and follow the rules, the elected politician only relies on himself, and not on rules and orders, in the competition for power over the State.<sup>116</sup>

Following this distinction between politics and administration, it turns out that the literature focusing on informal ties we just reviewed is basically assessing that there is a political element to officials’ appointments in China, and that it is not pure administration. We are, as a result, getting to the very definition of a Leninist system, which is ruled according to “democratic centralism.” It implies that the Party is both in charge of policy making and policy implementation, and that there is no difference between bureaucrats and politicians.<sup>117</sup> There is no politically neutral cadre: at the end of the day the Party is in control, as already shown by the literature on the cadre management system.<sup>118</sup> For this reason, I refer in the dissertation to the cadres’ *political* careers rather than depicting them as pure bureaucrats.

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<sup>114</sup> Pye, “Factions and the Politics of Guanxi: Paradoxes in Chinese Administrative and Political Behaviour,” 39.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>116</sup> Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David S. Owen (Hackett Publishing, 2004), 45.

<sup>117</sup> On democratic centralism, see: Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, 118–128.

<sup>118</sup> Burns, “Strengthening Central CCP Control of Leadership Selection: The 1990 Nomenklatura”; Brødsgaard, “Cadre and Personnel Management in the CPC,” August 2012.

Interestingly, this lack of separation between administration and politics has been described even beyond Leninist regimes. Studies on bureaucratic elites in democratic contexts have emphasized the increasing politicization of bureaucrats, as well as the bureaucratization of politicians.<sup>119</sup> In his study on contemporary French bureaucracy, Eymeri showed that the politicization of top bureaucrats has blurred the difference between the administrative and political spheres. He stressed that through their advice and propositions on specific topics, high level bureaucrats do take political actions.<sup>120</sup> These parallels illustrate that a comparative perspective is crucial to better understand the interaction between politics and administration in China and to get out of debates which tend to overstate China's uniqueness. Theoretical approaches developed in other contexts are hence at the foundation of my research.

Overall, the two branches of the literature that I have reviewed, on formal and informal politics, constitute the two sides of a same coin, with at its heart the interaction between administration and politics. I propose to develop an approach towards elite renewal and cohesion in China that takes this interaction seriously. In order to do so, I suggest we move beyond the limitations of elite studies, as noted by Roderic Camp: rather than focusing on the shared characteristics of the ruling elite, i.e. the outcome of the mobility process, it is time to carefully examine the *mechanisms* that bring these individuals to the top.<sup>121</sup> In the case of the CCP, the literature I reviewed tends to focus on broad outcomes, such as the fact that cadres became younger and more educated, but it falls short in unveiling the mechanisms at play. A change in perspective is necessary to allow us to follow the actors themselves through the

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<sup>119</sup> Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman, *Bureaucrats and Politicians in Western Democracies*; Ezra N Suleiman, *Dismantling Democratic States* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>120</sup> Jean-Michel Eymeri, "Frontières ou marches ? De la contribution de la haute administration à la production du politique [On the high administration's participation to the production of the political]," in *La politisation*, ed. Jacques Lagroye (Paris: Belin, 2003), 68.

<sup>121</sup> Roderic Ai Camp, *Political Recruitment across Two Centuries: Mexico, 1884-1991* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 27.

mobility process and to better grasp the processes that enable both renewal and cohesion of the Chinese elite.

In the following section, I review the interactionist theoretical tools, developed by the Chicago school of Sociology and in particular Howard Becker or Erving Goffman, which I use to analyze these mechanisms. I show that an approach focusing on personal commitment and career trajectories puts at the forefront of the analysis the point of view of the actors themselves, beyond the organization's goals. This enables me to demonstrate that the political and administrative features of the CCP are complementary rather than contradictory.

### ***C - An interactionist approach towards political mobility***

#### **1) Loyalty, commitment and career**

Loyalty is a key concept in the literature on Chinese elites but, as shown in the literature review, it is also poorly developed. It is generally only apprehended through the lens of Party membership. In addition, the distinction that we discussed between formal and informal politics separates the issue of cadres' organizational loyalty to the Party from their personal loyalties to one another. As argued earlier, I think that we should move beyond this distinction and focus on the cadres' point of view, be they recruiters or recruits, instead of the organization's perspective. The sociology of commitment strikes me as particularly useful to develop such an approach and question the often unspecified concept of loyalty. As defined by Howard Becker, commitment is "the process through which several kinds of interests become bound up with carrying out certain lines of behavior."<sup>122</sup> In contrast with a rather cognitive idea of loyalty, for instance based on adherence to ideology, the concept of commitment pays attention to the individual's interests and trajectory. Focusing on the processes through which cadres' interests

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<sup>122</sup> Howard Saul Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 27.

align with the Party line, and not to disobey orders or abandon their position, is a fruitful way to consider the organizational and personal factors which might come into play.

Compared to an approach in terms of loyalty, the concept of commitment brings a dynamic aspect to the analysis. It goes together with an approach in terms of career, as analyzed by Howard Becker in the case of marijuana users. The concept of the career implies progressive steps, which bring new costs and benefits previously inexistent or irrelevant.<sup>123</sup> Regarding drug users, Becker showed how every step forward into the practice makes the next steps possible or not: the users first have to learn the technique of drug using, in order to potentially learn to perceive its effects, and later learn to enjoy them.<sup>124</sup> Becker borrowed this concept from Hughes' study of professions,<sup>125</sup> stressing both its objective and subjective features: a career is both a sequence of social positions, as well as the evolution of the individual's perception over these positions and his trajectory as a whole. The individual's view on his own options at every level is the focus of the analysis, which allows the researcher to consider the structural constraints over the actors' actions but also how they perceive them. Applied to the political field, the concept of career helps us appreciate how recruits are progressively transformed by political organizations as well as how organizational socialization, through certain activities and

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<sup>123</sup> Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, 108.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 41–58.

<sup>125</sup> Everett C Hughes, *Men and Their Work* (Free Press, 1958).

encounters, can lead to political professionalization,<sup>126</sup> which is understood here as “living off” politics to borrow Max Weber’s famous expression.<sup>127</sup>

An approach in terms of commitment and career which focuses on individual actors allows me to tackle several of the limitations I pointed in the literature on elite renewal in China. First, contrary to a non-dynamic multivariate analysis focusing on explaining the outcomes of political mobility, this approach focuses on the mechanisms which makes political professionalization progressively possible and desirable. It goes beyond an explanation of the actors’ tactical choices simply based on their supposed preexisting identity. Second, it accounts for the agents’ perspective without negating the structural effect of the organization. Beyond the idea of a monolithic and omniscient CCP, we can here analyze the organization through the eyes of the actors who inhabit it. Instead of focusing on the organization’s ability to guarantee the actors’ loyalty through ideology or coercion, which tends to forget the actors’ perspective and agency, I study how individuals deal with the organization’s internal constraints based on their personal interests and tactics, as developed through the various stages of their career.

The notions of commitment and career are particularly prominent in the literatures on social movements and religious groups. I now turn to these subfields of the literature to further define my approach and develop specific aspects of the concept of commitment. The mechanisms at play in the commitment of political activists or religious followers are partly transposable to the case of political professionalization and illuminate elite cohesion in contemporary China.

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<sup>126</sup> On the concept of career applied to political organizations, see in particular : Éric Agrikoliansky, “Carrières militantes et vocation à la morale : les militants de la LDH dans les années 1980 [Militant careers and moral vocation : LDH militants in the 1980s],” *Revue française de science politique* Vol. 51, no. 1 (March 2001): 27–46; Muriel Darmon, “La notion de carrière: un instrument interactionniste d’objectivation [The notion of career: an interactionist tool],” *Politix* 82, no. 2 (2008): 149–67; Olivier Fillieule, “Propositions pour une analyse processuelle de l’engagement individuel - Post scriptum [Suggestions towards a processual analysis of individual commitment - Post scriptum],” *Revue française de science politique* 511, no. 1–2 (2001): 199–215.

<sup>127</sup> Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, xlix.

## 2) The non-material incentives for political commitment beyond ideology

Through the concept of commitment, and the rewards which go with it, one can analyze why Chinese cadres would choose a political career and carry on in that direction. A branch of the literature, very lively in French political sociology, enriched Olson's analysis of the "collective action dilemma" in order to shed light on the rewards which go together with political commitment. Olson's main idea is that "selective incentives" are the key to explaining one's rational engagement into a collective action aiming at acquiring a public good, as opposed to free-riding on the efforts of others.<sup>128</sup> Daniel Gaxie, in a seminal article of 1977, took this idea further and focused on the incentives, such as salary or career opportunities, leading militants to join political parties. When balancing the cost of being part of the organization and the profits based on these incentives, such militants find the cost of leaving is greater than the cost of remaining.<sup>129</sup>

In addition to the material enticements provided by political parties, Gaxie put the emphasis on the non-material incentives, which were only briefly mentioned by Olson.<sup>130</sup> Against the tendency to overemphasize ideology in order to explain political commitment, Gaxie put forward the personal symbolic and social incentives to elucidate the strong commitment of large numbers of voluntary militants in political parties.<sup>131</sup> The parallel with the Chinese case is obvious as the literature reviewed above highlights the decreasing value of

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<sup>128</sup> Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965).

<sup>129</sup> Daniel Gaxie, "Économie des partis et rétributions du militantisme [Economic Analysis of Parties and the Militants' Incentives]," *Revue française de science politique* 27, no. 1 (1977): 123–54.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

ideology for the recruitment of officials but, at the same time, does not provide an alternative explanation to their enduring commitment to a political career. Still, Gaxie's study focuses on parties' militants in a democratic system and cannot be completely imported into the Chinese context. In particular, it cannot account for the high level of commitment expected from Chinese officials, who often sign up for a life-long career within the CCP.

Communist parties have sometimes been qualified as "total institutions" due to the degree of commitment expected from their cadres. This concept was developed by Erving Goffman who defined a total institution, such as an asylum or a jail, as a living space, meticulously regulated, which separates the individuals from the outside world and from their previous roles in society.<sup>132</sup> The concept of total institution was later used to describe reclusive institutions such as religious communities, seminaries,<sup>133</sup> and also communist parties.<sup>134</sup> While it is an imperfect fit, since in contrast to asylums or jails, people voluntarily choose to join a political party, the concept is relevant to emphasize the importance of social and cognitive factors in these extreme forms of commitment. As argued by Verdès-Leroux, the type of commitment that classical total institutions usually obtain by coercion, is, through rituals and manipulation, willingly conceded by the individual in the case of the French Communist Party in the 1940 and 1950s. In particular, if members do not challenge the official line nor exit the

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<sup>132</sup> Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Anchor Books, 1961).

<sup>133</sup> Charles Suaud, *La vocation: conversion et reconversion des prêtres ruraux*. (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1978).

<sup>134</sup> See in particular : Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, "Une institution totale auto-perpétuée: le parti communiste français [ a self-perpetuating total institution: the French Communist Party]," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 36, no. 1 (1981): 33–63; Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, "Institutions totales ou institutions batardes? Les anciennes écoles de cadres des partis communistes et leurs métamorphoses [total Institutions or Hybrid Institutions? The Former Schools for Communist Party Cadres and Their Transformations]," in *Erving Goffman et les institutions totales*, ed. Charles Amourous and Alain Blanc (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), 175–98.

organization, it is not because of any physical obstacle to do so, but above all because of the fear to be labeled as apostates.<sup>135</sup>

In line with this concept of total institution, the literature on cults and sects further explored the social and cognitive features of commitment. This is exemplified by Kanter's study of several American utopian communities of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which can be seen as total institutions. Based on these cases, she highlighted three main kinds of commitment, which are linked to different personal relationships with the organizations and can be mutually reinforcing: *cognitive-continuance commitment*, *cathectic-cohesion commitment*, and *evaluative-control commitment*.<sup>136</sup>

Cognitive-continuance commitment refers to commitment to social roles: the individual invests in the fate of a specific organization and in the role he developed in it. The actors think here in terms of sacrifice and investment and therefore, the more they invest, the less they will accept to exit and lose their investment. This type of commitment explains why they stay in an organization on the long run, but does not account for their behavior within it. For instance, individuals who have personally invested in an organization will remain members even though they sometimes do not follow its rules. Kanter illustrated this type of commitment through the example of teenagers who are personally invested in their family and will not run away, even though they do not always listen to their parents.

Cathectic-cohesion commitment, is linked to social ties: the individuals get personally attached to other members of the group. Their commitment grows with the development of social ties within the group and the renunciation of relationships outside the group. It implies

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<sup>135</sup> Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, *Au service du Parti: 1944-1956 [For the Party: 1944-1956]* (Paris: Fayard : Éditions de Minuit, 1983), 110.

<sup>136</sup> Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "Commitment and Social Organization: A Study of Commitment Mechanisms in Utopian Communities," *American Sociological Review* 33, no. 4 (August 1968): 499–517.



that the individuals will remain part of this group even though the ideology of the organization changes for instance, because they value these relationships too much and do not want to risk breaking them. Kanter illustrated this phenomenon referring to the comradeship developed within a social movement or a religious group.

Evaluative-control commitment refers to the values and norms which constrain the individuals. This can for instance refer to commitment to a certain ideology, embodied by the group. But in this case the commitment is linked to the norm rather than the organization itself. Therefore, if the norm changes, exit can occur. This type of commitment can hardly explain in itself the long term personal commitment to a group, but rather the lack of deviance within the group in case everyone strongly adheres to its norms. However, as underlined by Kanter, such strong level of adherence within the group is specific to total institutions. It implies a renunciation of personal interests in order to dissolve oneself in the group for maximum compliance. I think this cannot be applied to the study of individuals who freely start a political career and are continuously in competition with one another for further advancement in the organization, which sometimes implies bending the rules. We are reaching the limits of the parallel between total institutions, such as asylums, and institutions which are competitive by definition, such as political parties.

Kanter's article is valuable in developing these different, mutually reinforcing, mechanisms through which an individual can become committed to an organization. The two first types of commitment are of particular interest to the present research. They highlight the mechanisms through which a group can keep its members despite changing its norms and values. They are therefore highly relevant to understanding elite cohesion within a Chinese Communist Party decreasingly structured by ideology. The third type of commitment, on the other end, is based on commitment to the norm rather than the organization itself. As a result, it cannot account for elite cohesion in a time of ideological uncertainty. By focusing on social roles and

social ties, I also distance myself from a simplistic approach focusing purely on ideological motivations to explain commitment to an organization. Both the literature on social movements and cults have in fact shown that adherence to a group's values is often a result of the first steps of commitment, and of the ties already developed with the group itself, rather than the other way around.<sup>137</sup>

I now get into the details of the commitment to social roles and the commitment to social ties developed by Kanter in order to highlight how these mechanisms can be applied to political professionalization and help better understand elite cohesion in post-Mao China.

### **3) Vocation and commitment to political roles**

Kanter's cognitive-continuance commitment refers to the idea that an individual's commitment depends on how much one invests in an activity. One's willingness to personally invest depends on the social roles one develops within an organization and the extent to which one learns to appreciate it. The importance of one's social role and aspiration to join a certain elite is particularly prominent in studies of political professionalization.

Building on Goffman's analogy between everyday interactions and the interpretation of a variety of roles by an actor on stage,<sup>138</sup> scholars have focused on the role politicians embody when taking up a position. As defined by Jacques Lagroye, the role is here understood as the set of behaviors which are linked to a specific position and which make it palpable to others.<sup>139</sup> The role is therefore made of the public expectations towards an individual in this position, but

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<sup>137</sup> Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, "Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects," *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 6 (1980): 1376–95; Robert D Benford and David A Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual review of sociology* 26 (2000): 611.

<sup>138</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959).

<sup>139</sup> Jacques Lagroye, "Être du métier [Insiders]," *Politix* 7, no. 28 (1994): 5–15.

also of the individual's own views on what it implies. The role is progressively internalized by the actor: the expectations attached to it both constrain and enable his actions.<sup>140</sup> As argued by Briquet, the role should not only be seen negatively as a constraint: it can also be used strategically, to legitimize one's position in a group or organization.<sup>141</sup>

The concept of role, both in its constraining and strategic aspects, is a key aspect of a political career. Commitment to the role itself is therefore crucial to understand someone's decision to pursue a political life. We are getting to the question of vocation and to the classic distinction made by Max Weber between living *off* or *for* politics. If one lives for politics, beyond the material rewards one gets off it, one has to enjoy the role itself and has to develop a vocation.<sup>142</sup> A vocation is developed through the professionalization process and further commits the individuals to this path. A study of young militants in contemporary French political youth organizations, for instance, highlighted that political ambition is often not a primary cause of political engagement but that career opportunities become reachable and desirable through the commitment process itself.<sup>143</sup> As a parallel, Eymeri also put forward in the case of high level civil servants in contemporary France that their vocation as servants of the State is rarely what drove them to choose this path in the first place. While during their studies they mostly followed the path of good students in social sciences, aiming for conformity, they progressively developed a vocation which led them towards very competitive exams and

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.; Rémi Lefebvre, "Se conformer à son rôle. Les ressorts de l'intériorisation institutionnelle [Conforming to One's Role. The Mechanisms of Institutional Internalization]," in *Sociologie de l'institution*, ed. Jacques Lagroye and Michel Offerlé (Paris: Belin, 2011), 219–47.

<sup>141</sup> Jean-Louis Briquet, "Communiquer en actes. Prescriptions de rôle et exercice quotidien du métier politique [Communicating through Actions. Role and the Daily Exercise of Power]," *Politix* 7, no. 28 (1994): 25

<sup>142</sup> Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, xlix.

<sup>143</sup> Lucie Bargel, *Jeunes socialistes, jeunes UMP: lieux et processus de socialisation politique [Young socialists and young UMP: Sites and processes of political socialization]* (Paris: Dalloz, 2009), 23.

a career in the civil service.<sup>144</sup> The development of a vocation is overall the result of a process through which the young political recruits internalize their life project as part of an elite and are given the idea that they are both competent and legitimate to attain these positions.

Oddly, the issue of vocation is completely absent from the literature on elite renewal and cohesion in communist regimes. There is a propensity to portray the recruits as indoctrinated. I argue instead that the cadres' perspective and their commitment to a political role should be taken seriously in order to explain why someone would pursue a political life, especially in a regime like post-Mao China where political career is not the only upward social mobility channel.

#### **4) The social dimension of commitment**

##### **a) Personal ties and group dynamics**

In addition to the commitment to the role, or what we have qualified as a vocation, Kanter emphasized the importance of social ties in what she called a cathetic-cohesion commitment.<sup>145</sup> The role played by social ties in order to explain political commitment has been particularly emphasized by the literature on social movements. It has put forward the importance of a multiplicity of social networks, both preexistent or developed through the commitment process, in order to explain why individuals take part in political activities and remain active overtime.<sup>146</sup> In his study of the Paris Commune, Roger Gould analyzed for

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<sup>144</sup> Jean-Michel Eymeri, *La fabrique des énarques [Making enarques]* (Paris, Fr: Economica, 2001), 152.

<sup>145</sup> Kanter, "Commitment and Social Organization: A Study of Commitment Mechanisms in Utopian Communities."

<sup>146</sup> See in particular: Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movements* (Englewood Cliffs., N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973); Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Dennis Chong, *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Frédéric Sawicki and Bruno Duriez, "Réseaux de Sociabilité et Adhésion Syndicale. Le Cas de La CFDT [Social Networks and Trade-Union Membership. the Case of CFDT]," *Politix* 16, no. 63 (2003): 17–51.

instance the interaction between preexisting neighborhood ties and the ones created through the organization of the movement, in order to explain the high level of group cohesion during a crisis situation.<sup>147</sup>

Following Gaxie's emphasis on the non-material incentives for political commitment, the literature on individual's commitment within political organizations has also indicated the important effect of social ties in explaining why one would become and remain a militant.<sup>148</sup> In fact, Daniel Gaxie demonstrated how obvious the social function of a party organization is, given the large number of inefficient meetings: if the members keep on organizing so many practically useless meetings, it is that they value the fact of meeting itself.<sup>149</sup>

The social features of the political party can be assessed through the transformation of one's personal ties and networks. The most obvious is the shaping of friendly and romantic relationships. Focusing on political youth organizations in contemporary France, Lucie Bargel showed how organizations shape the relationships of their members.<sup>150</sup> It echoes the idea developed by Gaxie that parties are often considered as new families by their members, integrating them within a whole new social network. This development of personal relationships within the organization progressively reinforces individual commitment to the organization, as exit becomes socially and emotionally costly. This is true beyond political

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<sup>147</sup> Roger V. Gould, "Multiple Networks and Mobilization in the Paris Commune, 1871," *American Sociological Review* 56, no. 6 (December 1991): 716–29.

<sup>148</sup> See in particular : Gaxie, "Économie des partis et rétributions du militantisme [Economic Analysis of Parties and the Militants' Incentives]"; Frédéric Sawicki, *Les réseaux du Parti socialiste: sociologie d'un milieu partisan [The Socialist Party's networks]* (Paris: Belin, 1997); Sawicki and Duriez, "Réseaux de Sociabilité et Adhésion Syndicale. Le Cas de La CFDT [Social Networks and Trade-Union Membership. the Case of CFDT]"; Agrikoliansky, "Carrières militantes et vocation à la morale: les militants de la LDH dans les années 1980 [Militant careers and moral vocation : LDH militants in the 1980s]."

<sup>149</sup> Gaxie, "Économie des partis et rétributions du militantisme [Economic Analysis of Parties and the Militants' Incentives]," 148.

<sup>150</sup> Bargel, *Jeunes socialistes, jeunes UMP: lieux et processus de socialisation politique [Young socialists and young UMP: Sites and processes of political socialization]*, 455.

organizations, as shown by this statement from Becker's study on drugs users: "a drug addict once told me that the moment she felt she was really 'hooked' was when she realized she no longer had any friends who were not drug addicts."<sup>151</sup>

Studies in sociology of the military have also emphasized the effects of strong bonds among primary group members on the overall organizational cohesion, such primary groups being generally understood as platoon-size fighting units. According to this literature, primary group level social dynamics explain the cohesion of the organization as a whole, beyond ideology or selective material incentives.<sup>152</sup> In a famous study, Shils and Janowitz argued that the Wehrmacht's cohesion level and its combat efficiency were not the result of political convictions but of strong primary groups stable overtime.<sup>153</sup> Bargel stressed the importance of such subgroups in the case of political organizations. In her study of contemporary French youth political organizations, she showed how the recruits are integrated within the whole organization through a variety of clubs and subgroups. These groups being smaller and made of people who know each other through face to face interactions, strong cohesion is easier to maintain.<sup>154</sup>

However, an argument solely based on primary groups solidarity is questioned by Bearman who showed in a study of the Confederate troops during the American civil war that strong ties within the smaller units, in this case based on local identities, can also push soldiers

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<sup>151</sup> Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, 38.

<sup>152</sup> For a review of this literature, see : Guy Siebold, "The Essence of Military Group Cohesion," *Armed Forces & Society* 33, no. 2 (2007): 286–95.

<sup>153</sup> Edward A Shils and Morris Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1948): 280–315.

<sup>154</sup> Bargel, *Jeunes socialistes, jeunes UMP: lieux et processus de socialisation politique [Young socialists and young UMP: Sites and processes of political socialization]*, 416.

to desert in groups.<sup>155</sup> This study raises the question of the primary groups' level of autonomy regarding the broader organization. The primary groups imply another level of non-material rewards for the individual's commitment, in addition to the overall structure. These two scales of incentives have to remain inseparable for the overall cohesion to be maintained. A recent article revisited this literature on army cohesion and examined the various mechanisms of organizational socialization which reinforce overall cohesion. Through the examples of the Wehrmacht and the US army in Vietnam, Paul Kenny showed that while primary group cohesion is important, it must go together with a strong discipline. To put it in another way, to reinforce the organizational integrity, cohesive primary groups cannot be too autonomous.<sup>156</sup>

#### **b) Institutionalized group dynamics in contemporary China**

Martin Whyte has emphasized the importance of primary groups in the Chinese polity. He shed light on the CCP's capacity to shape individuals' socialization through the creation of a variety of small groups in every social organization. These groups are headed by Party members or officials in charge of monitoring them. The CCP does not coopt preexisting groups but creates them through its organizational structure. According to Whyte, this is a Chinese specificity compared to other Leninist systems such as the USSR, and it has proven effective in order to mobilize people during the mass campaigns of the Mao era. Individuals are surrounded by people who comply with the policies and it therefore becomes very hard for them not to comply.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Peter S. Bearman, "Desertion as Localism: Army Unit Solidarity and Group Norms in the U.S. Civil War," *Social Forces* 70, no. 2 (1991): 321.

<sup>156</sup> Paul D. Kenny, "Organizational Weapons: Explaining Cohesion in the Military" (Households in Conflict Network, 2011).

<sup>157</sup> Martin King Whyte, *Small Groups and Political Rituals in China*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 10–14.

This idea of the CCP's capacity to reorganize social ties to best mobilize the population is further developed by Andrew Walder in the case of factory workers. However, what Walder described is not a multiplicity of separated and cohesive primary groups but an overall clientelist network linking the workers to factory managers through lower ranked supervisors. As workers are dependent on this network for public goods and services, as well as for their personal career progression, it guarantees their compliance with the management's orders. Walder argued that these clientelist ties replace the impersonal standards of behavior dictated by the Communist ideology, upon which the individuals are supposed to be evaluated. At every level of the organizational structure, the supervisor determines whom he thinks shows adherence to the regime's ideology through their behavior. He therefore rewards the individuals who, according to him, display such commitment. Such a system tends to evolve into a personal patron-client relationship.<sup>158</sup>

Walder called *principled particularism* this "clientelist system in which public loyalty to the party and its ideology is mingled with personal loyalties between party branch officials and their clients."<sup>159</sup> It is not the conformity to ideals which is rewarded but the concrete compliance of the worker to the Party branch.<sup>160</sup> Specific rewards for compliance and display of loyalty are instituted as organizational principles.<sup>161</sup>

With the progress of marketization, Andrew Walder described the change in the nature of work relations in post-Mao China. He argued that the expression of political loyalty was not a central criterion for professional promotion anymore and that work performance was

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<sup>158</sup> Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry*.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.



becoming the new way to evaluate a worker's commitment.<sup>162</sup> Still he noted that specific positions in the factory's CCP leadership structure were still given based on political commitment.<sup>163</sup>

An extension of Walder's approach beyond the industrial field is warranted for the study of elite cohesion in post-Mao China. Interestingly, the principled particularism he described is a product of the organization, it is not formal nor informal. Clientelism hence does not exist separately from the Party-State organization but emerges from it. It is different from other types of personal ties, such as factions or cliques, which are competing with organizational loyalties, and are therefore a kind of *unprincipled particularism*, seen as illegitimate by the Party.<sup>164</sup> This approach is interesting in that it links personal loyalties to organizational ones, but also in how it differentiates among a variety of personal ties. The development of strong unified factions endangering the survival of the party as a whole is opposed to the multiplicity of ties that affect positively the individuals' commitment to the organization.

To enrich Walder's concept of principled particularism, and more broadly our understanding of elite cohesion in post-Mao China, it is also important to delve into the articulation of these various networks. Chinese officials, by going from one position to the next, develop their personal network within the Party-State. By following their career, we can then understand how these various ties interact in order to induce his commitment to different subgroups or to the organization as a whole. Do such ties lead to the development of autonomy primary groups or, by contrast, prevent it by developing ties across groups? Overall, an in-depth analysis of these various social ties developed through the organization can help us understand

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 175–181.

the mechanisms guaranteeing one's commitment to a political career and how it influences the overall cohesion of the Chinese political elite.

### 5) Commitment and youth organizations: a multi-level analysis

To develop an approach of political mobility in post-Mao China based on the concept of commitment, I chose to focus on cadres' recruitment through the CCP's youth organizations. While these organizations are not the only recruitment channel for political positions, they are an excellent observation point to study politicians in the making. This is true in a variety of contexts as highlighted by Lucie Bargel in her study of two major youth political organizations in contemporary France.<sup>165</sup> In contrast to studies focusing on already established political elites, by looking at the first stages of one's political career we can analyze in detail how officials cultivate a specific role and vocation. Youth organizations also provide a highly relevant perspective regarding the development of personal relationships and how it may influence one's commitment to a political career. Within these organizations, the young recruits can develop relationships which will be important for the rest of their life. Departing from studies which simplistically dismiss the political commitment of young people as the result of an identity crisis,<sup>166</sup> I take seriously the mechanisms occurring at the youth organization level, since they have a key influence on cadres' future trajectories, and therefore on the overall cohesion of the elite in the context of elite renewal.

Beyond the focus on the first steps of the commitment process, studying a specific organization within the Chinese Party-State, and the careers of its members, allows for an analysis combining multiple perspectives: *micro* regarding the agents' perspectives, *meso*

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<sup>165</sup> Bargel, *Jeunes socialistes, jeunes UMP: lieux et processus de socialisation politique [Young socialists and young UMP: Sites and processes of political socialization]*.

<sup>166</sup> Lewis S Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations: The Character and Significance of Student Movements* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

regarding the evolution of the youth organization itself, and *macro* with regard to the transformations of the Chinese regime itself.<sup>167</sup> These three levels of analysis have to be understood in their articulation. By focusing on the young recruits, we can have a micro level analysis of the commitment process of officials in the making. However, the agents' careers must be understood in the context of the youth organization's rules and structure to go beyond a purely biographical analysis. The youth organization's structure, in turn, also depends on the evolution of the regime and the configuration of political forces at the top of the Party-State. The organization cannot be analyzed independently from a macroscopic analysis of the regime itself and its dynamics. The macro perspective allows us to understand how the regime's evolution can lead to various organizational configurations: certain profiles of recruits or organizations becoming more valued than others in terms of elite renewal for instance as the top leaders want to develop a specific power base. These changing political situations in turn influence the agents' tactics. And finally, the evolution of the agents' career and commitment influences the cohesion and trajectory of the youth organization but also that of the Party-State.

The multi-leveled analysis I suggest allows to better grasp the interaction between the evolution of political configurations and individuals' tactics. Before unveiling the research design, I make a last incursion in the literature and now turn to the scholarship on political youth organizations in post-Mao China. I highlight what a focus on these organizations could contribute to the literature on elite renewal.

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<sup>167</sup> Regarding these three levels of analysis and the study of political commitment, see : Frédéric Sawicki and Johanna Siméant, "Décloisonner la sociologie de l'engagement militant. Note critique sur quelques tendances récentes des travaux français [Decomartmentalizing the sociology of political commitment. Critical memo on recent trends among French studies]," *Sociologie du travail* 51, no. 1 (2009): 97–125.

## ***D - The Chinese Communist Youth League in comparative perspective***

### **1) Youth organizations and elite renewal**

The role played by political youth organizations in terms of elite renewal may seem obvious but only a few studies focus on this issue. This is true in both democratic and non-democratic regimes, as noted by Bargel in her work on youth political organizations in contemporary France.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, while some studies statistically show that numerous politicians come from these organizations, very few unveil the mechanisms at play.<sup>169</sup> These organizations remain black boxes. In the case of European democracies, some studies stand out in the way they unveil the role played by student unions<sup>170</sup> or the youth organizations of political parties<sup>171</sup> in cultivating a political vocation and specific skills among young recruits. Lucie Bargel's work is the most comprehensive example, analyzing in detail contemporary French youth political organizations.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Bargel, *Jeunes socialistes, jeunes UMP: lieux et processus de socialisation politique [Young socialists and young UMP: Sites and processes of political socialization]*.

<sup>169</sup> See in particular the studies by Ecchi and Hooghe et. Al., respectively on Italy and Belgium : Ettore Recchi, "Politics as Occupational Choice: Youth Self-Selection for Party Careers in Italy," *European Sociological Review* 15, no. 1 (1999): 107–24; Marc Hooghe, Dietlind Stolle, and Patrick Stouthuysen, "Head Start in Politics: The Recruitment Function of Youth Organizations of Political Parties in Belgium (Flanders)," *Party Politics* 10, no. 2 (2004): 193–212.

<sup>170</sup> See in particular regarding student unions : Sébastien Michon, "Le syndicalisme étudiant : antichambre de la profession politique ? [Student Trade-Unions: Prelude to Political Professionalization?]," in *La condition politique des syndicats. Approche comparée*, ed. Nicolas Defaud and Aurélie Llobet (Paris: L'Harmattan, Forthcoming); Jean-Yves Sabot, *Le syndicalisme étudiant et la guerre d'Algérie: l'entrée d'une génération en politique et la formation d'une élite [Student trade-unions during the Algerian war]* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995).

<sup>171</sup> See in particular regarding political parties' youth organizations : Florence Moncourtois, "Les jeunes dirigeants politiques français : le cas des responsables nationaux des mouvements de jeunesse politiques [The Young French Political Leaders: The Case of the National Youth Political Movements' Heads]" (PhD dissertation, Université Paris 1 Sorbonne, 1997); François Audigier, "Les organisations politiques de jeunesse, des écoles d'éloquence? Les cas des JRI et de l'UJP [Youth political organization as eloquence schools? the cases of JRI and UJP]," in *L'éloquence politique en France et en Italie de 1870 à nos jours: études*, ed. Fabrice d'Almeida (Rome: École française de Rome, 2001), 231–46; Bargel, *Jeunes socialistes, jeunes UMP: lieux et processus de socialisation politique [Young socialists and young UMP: Sites and processes of political socialization]*.

<sup>172</sup> Bargel, *Jeunes socialistes, jeunes UMP: lieux et processus de socialisation politique [Young socialists and young UMP: Sites and processes of political socialization]*; Lucie Bargel, "S'attacher à la politique. Carrières de jeunes socialistes professionnels [Becoming attached to politics. Careers of young professional socialists],"

In the case of communist regimes, several studies have underlined the importance of the Party-controlled youth organizations to supervise youth activities. Fainsod and Fisher in their respective studies of the Soviet All Union Leninist Communist Youth League, or Komsomol, put forward its major role in terms of youth indoctrination and control.<sup>173</sup> According to Fainsod, Leninist regimes are unique in their level of organization and indoctrination of youth.<sup>174</sup> In light of such an assessment, it is surprising to see that while the elite renewal function of these youth organizations is often stated,<sup>175</sup> it has not been analyzed in detail yet. By taking the recruits' perspective seriously, I distance myself from the tendency to picture these organizations as mere indoctrination machines, manipulating passive young people. Beyond the Soviet case, this is also how they have been largely depicted in other authoritarian contexts.<sup>176</sup>

In addition to being seen as pure indoctrination organizations, the communist youth organizations are largely described as unchangeable remnants of the past. To my knowledge, not a single study explains the overtime evolution of the role they play in elite renewal and cohesion. In particular, comparing their role during the revolutionary struggle with what happens once the Party-State has hegemonic power, or even when it liberalizes the economy. One of the few studies approaching youth organizations from a dynamic perspective is

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*Sociétés Contemporaines* 84, no. 4 (2011): 79–102; Lucie Bargel, “Apprendre un métier qui ne s’apprend pas. Carrières dans les organisations de jeunesse des partis [Learning a trade which cannot be learned. Careers in the parties’ youth organizations],” *Sociologie* 5, no. 2 (2014): 171.

<sup>173</sup> Merle Fainsod, “The Komsomols. A Study of Youth Under Dictatorship,” *The American Political Science Review* 45, no. 1 (1951): 18–40; Ralph Talcott Jr Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth : A Study of the Congresses of the Komsomol, 1918-1954*, Studies of the Russian Institute (New York: Columbia University, 1960).

<sup>174</sup> Fainsod, “The Komsomols. A Study of Youth Under Dictatorship.”

<sup>175</sup> Regarding the Soviet case, see in particular : Ibid.; Frederic J Fleron, “Representation of Career Types in the Soviet Political Leadership,” in *Political Leadership in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. Barry R Farrell (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1970), 108–39; Jonathan Steele and Eric Abraham, *Andropov in Power: From Komsomol to Kremlin* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984).

<sup>176</sup> See in particular : Gino Germani, “Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Regimes: Italy and Spain,” in *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society; the Dynamics of Established One-Party Systems*, ed. Samuel P Huntington and Clement Henry Moore (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 339–79.

Solnick's *Stealing the State*. Solnick showed how Gorbachev experimented his reform ideas on the Komsomol, which led to its disintegration. The decentralization of the Komsomol's budget, as well as of the control over its officials, to its local organizations in 1987-88 led to a "bank run" phenomenon. The local Komsomol officials started to use the organization's resources to develop local businesses and progressively separated themselves from the control of the Party-State.<sup>177</sup> While it only touched upon the question of elite renewal, Solnick's study is very interesting in pointing at the evolution potential of such organizations and how it can impact the Communist system as a whole.

Focusing on the evolution of the Chinese Communist Youth League (CYL), the current study contributes to the thin literature on the recruitment and commitment formation functions of political youth organizations around the world and helps to put the Chinese case in a comparative context. The Chinese case is particularly relevant regarding the issue of commitment as membership in the CYL is not compulsory, by contrast with other authoritarian regimes, such as Nazi Germany.<sup>178</sup> It is therefore important to understand why young people join the CYL and even become CYL officials, in the context of a liberalizing economy and the multiplicity of career options it entails. This study unveils the evolution of the role played by such organizations in the context of a reforming communist regime. Finally, it allows me to bring back to the center of the debate the agency of young people themselves in a literature which tends to take a top-down approach and to focus on how the Party-State, especially in communist systems, controls or harnesses young people through political youth organizations.

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<sup>177</sup> Steven Lee Solnick, *Stealing the State: Control and Collapse in Soviet Institutions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>178</sup> Sibylle Hübner-Funk, "La génération des jeunesses hitlériennes. Transitions, transformations, transmissions [Hitlerian Youth Generation. Transitions, Transformations and Transmissions]," in *Jeunesses et politique*, ed. Raymond Hudon and Bernard Fournier, vol. 2, Sociétés et Mutations (Sainte-Foy, Québec, Canada : Paris: Presses de l'Université Laval ; L'Harmattan, 1994), 163–83.

## 2) The Communist Youth League in post-Mao China

### a) The League as the Party's core youth organization

The Chinese Communist Youth League (*Zhongguo gongchan zhuyi qingnian tuan*, 中国共产主义青年团; CYL) is the main youth organization of the CCP. Officially founded in 1922, it is one of the biggest political organizations in the world, similar in size to the CCP,<sup>179</sup> with 87.5 million members by the end of 2015.<sup>180</sup> Established after the model of the Soviet Komsomol, the CYL has been a key adjunct of the Party since its creation. Before 1949, it was a main tool in the CCP's struggle for power. After 1949, it became a governing instrument to manage young people's activities. The CYL was under attack during the Cultural revolution and stopped its activities in 1966. The provincial CYL committees were reestablished starting in 1973, followed by the national organization in 1978. The CYL can now be found at every level of the Party-State hierarchy and it is very active in units with numerous young people, such as schools and universities.<sup>181</sup> The CYL also supervises the other youth organizations of the CCP, mainly the All-China Youth Federation (*Zhonghua qingnian lianhehui*, 中国青年联合会), the All-China Student Federation (*Zhonghua quanguo xuesheng lianhehui*, 中华全国学生联合会), and the Young Pioneers of China (*Zhongguo shaonian xianfeng dui*, 中国少年先锋队) – dedicated to children from 6 to 14 years old.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> The CCP had close to 88.75 million members by the end of 2015 (“Chinese Communist Party's Membership Growth Slows,” *Financial Times*, June 30, 2016).

<sup>180</sup> “Over 87 Mln Chinese Communist Youth League Members,” *Xinhua*, May 3, 2016.

<sup>181</sup> Chien-Wen Kou, “CYL Cadres Rising in the Era of Hu Jintao: Factional Considerations or Organizational Mission of Channeling Cadres,” *Prospect Journal* 3 (2007): 77–116.

<sup>182</sup> “Charter of the All-China Youth Federation (*Zhonghua quanguo qingnian lianhehui zhangcheng*, 中华全国青年联合会章程),” Congress of the All-China Youth Federation, 24 August 2010.

Surprisingly, in the English literature, there has been no systematic study of the CYL since its reestablishment after the Cultural Revolution in 1978. Different studies from Western and Taiwanese scholars dealing with the organization from the 1920s to the 1970s brought important insights on the organization of the League and its relations with the Party, but obviously cannot account for its evolution since then.<sup>183</sup> The few studies in English which touched upon the case of the CYL in post-Mao China only focused on the decline of the CYL's indoctrination function. They argued that with the decreasing ideological hegemony of the CCP and the emergence of new channels of social mobility in the 1980s, the CYL has progressively lost its control over Chinese youth.<sup>184</sup> This narrative regarding the decline of the CYL is very common: the CYL is either viewed as an anachronistic and conservative organization incapable of evolving in post-Mao China,<sup>185</sup> or by contrast it is depicted as too much involved in the 1989 movement and therefore politically weakened after its repression.<sup>186</sup> As I demonstrate in this dissertation, these polarized views cannot account for the evolution of the CYL, especially after

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<sup>183</sup> Klaus H. Pringsheim, "The Functions of the Chinese Communist Youth Leagues (1920–1949)," *The China Quarterly* 12 (December 1962): 75–91; James R Townsend, *The Revolutionization of Chinese Youth: A Study of Chung-Kuo Ch'ing-Nien* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1967); Victor Funnell, "The Chinese Communist Youth Movement, 1949–1966," *The China Quarterly* 42 (June 1970): 105; Shelah Gilbert Leader, "The Communist Youth League and the Cultural Revolution," *Asian Survey* 14, no. 8 (August 1974): 700–715; Ronald Nicholas Montaperto, "The Chinese Communist Youth League and the Political Socialization of Chinese Youth" (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1977); Ronald Nicholas Montaperto, "The Chinese Communist Youth League, 1970–1974: A Study of Adaptive Behavior," in *Organizational Behavior in Chinese Society*, ed. Sidney L Greenblatt, Richard W Wilson, and Amy Auerbacher Wilson (New York, N.Y.: Praeger, 1981); Tang Bo (唐勃), *Research on the Communist Youth League of the Chinese Communist Party (Zhonggong Gongqingtuan zhi yanjiu, 中共共青团之研究)* (Taipei: Youshi wenhua shiye gongsi, 1985); Sofia Graziani, "Youth and the Making of Modern China," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 13, no. 1 (January 2014): 117–49.

<sup>184</sup> The work of Stanley Rosen is a good example of this branch of literature: Stanley Rosen, "Prosperity, Privatization, and China's Youth," *Problems of Communism* 34 (1985): 1–28; Stanley Rosen, "The Effect of Post-4 June Re-Education Campaigns on Chinese Students," *The China Quarterly* 310–34 (June 1993).

<sup>185</sup> See in particular : Rosen, "Prosperity, Privatization, and China's Youth"; Gordon White, *Riding the Tiger: The Politics of Economic Reform in Post-Mao China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).

<sup>186</sup> Datong Li, "China's Youth League Faction: Incubus of Power?," *OpenDemocracy*, October 31, 2007, [https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/democracy\\_power/china\\_inside/youth\\_league](https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/democracy_power/china_inside/youth_league).



1989. In particular, they cannot explain the steady increase in CYL membership over the period and the role it plays in terms of elite renewal.

By contrast, the Chinese literature on the CYL after 1978 is very large. Most studies adopt a descriptive and historical approach of the organization's activities. While very informative, these studies do not really develop an analytical framework explaining the evolution of the CYL in post-Mao China.<sup>187</sup> Some other studies propose a more analytical approach of the organization and its ideology. The main issue is that they often develop a normative viewpoint on the CYL, from the perspective of the Chinese State or the organization itself.<sup>188</sup> Most of these studies are actually conducted by former CYL cadres<sup>189</sup> or by the CYL's research centers themselves.<sup>190</sup> These studies analyze only superficially the role played by the CYL in terms of elite renewal, even though the CYL is officially presented as the Party's "reserve force" (*houbeijun*, 后备军).<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> See in particular: Li Yuqi (李玉琦), *Short Story of the Chinese Communist Youth League (Zhongguo Gongqingtuan shigao, 中国共青团史稿)* (Beijing: China Youth Press, 2012); Luo Chengquan (罗成全), *The Communist Youth League in the high tide of China's reforms, 1978-1994 (Zhongguo gaige dachao zhong de Gongqingtuan, 中国改革大潮中的共青团, 1978-1994)* (Tianjin: Tianjin People's Press, 1996).

<sup>188</sup> This tendency is well reflected in Li Wuyi book's title: Li Wuyi (李五一), *Analysis and Practice of the CYL's Support to the Government in Managing Youth Affairs (Gongqingtuan xiezhu zhengfu guanli qingshaonian shiwu de yanjiu yu shijian, 共青团协助政府管理青少年事务的研究与实践)* (Beijing: Chinese Society Press, 2009).

<sup>189</sup> See for instance: Zheng Changzhong (郑长忠), "Organizational Capital and Political Party Survival – Analytical Perspective on the Political Function of the Chinese Communist Youth League (*zuzhi ziben yu zhengdang yanxu - Zhongguo Gongqingtuan zhengzhi gongneng de yige kaocha shijiao, 组织资本与政党延续 - 中国共青团政治功能的一个考察视角*)" (PhD Dissertation, Fudan University, 2005); Shen Jianping (沈健平), *A Political Science Approach Towards the Communist Youth League (zhengzhixue shiyexia de Zhongguo Gongqingtuan, 政治学视野下的中国共青团)* (Beijing: China Aerospace Press, 2009).

<sup>190</sup> See for instance: An Guoqi (安国启), *A research report on contemporary communist youth league work in urban areas (dangdai chengshi Gongqingtuan gongzuo yanjiu baogao, 当代城市共青团工作研究报告)* (Beijing: Chinese Society Press, 2009); An Guoqi (安国启) and Deng Xiquan (邓希泉), *Research on the Construction and Renovation of the CYL at the local level (Gongqingtuan jiceng zuzhi jianshe yu chuanxin yanjiu, 共青团基层组织建设与创新研究)* (Beijing: Chinese Society Press, 2010).

<sup>191</sup> "Charter of the Chinese Communist Party (*Zhongguo gongchandang zhangcheng, 中国共产党章程*)," Congress of the CCP, 14 November 2012.

## b) The Party's *reserve force*

As the Party's "reserve force," the CYL has a dual role in terms of recruitment and training. First, it recruits members between 14 and 28 years old, screens and trains them so they can eventually become CCP members. But since CYL membership is now extremely broad, it has no major significance in terms of political career. The CYL had 87.5 million members in 2015, equaling around a quarter of Chinese young people between 14 and 28 years old, among which only a small minority eventually become Party-State officials.<sup>192</sup> The second function of the CYL as a reserve force, and on which I focus, is the recruitment and training of new cadres who generally become CCP officials.

Since the first years of the CCP, the CYL has been an important promotion channel for Party officials. According to Zheng Changzhong, between 1921 and 2002, 22.76% of CCP Central Committee members had an experience as CYL cadres at various levels.<sup>193</sup> This implied that they were not only members of the CYL but were appointed as officials within the organization. However, it is mostly after its reorganization in 1978 that this specific role of the CYL has been emphasized by specialists of Chinese politics. According to several studies of the early years of the reform era, the two groups of cadres which benefited the most from the reforms were princelings, children of revolutionary leaders, and former CYL officials.<sup>194</sup> In fact, since the 1980s, the role played by the CYL in terms of recruitment and promotion of cadres

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<sup>192</sup> "Over 87 Mln Chinese Communist Youth League Members," *Xinhua*, May 3, 2016.

<sup>193</sup> Zheng Changzhong (郑长忠), "Organizational Capital and Political Party Survival – Analytical Perspective on the Political Function of the Chinese Communist Youth League (*zuzhi ziben yu zhengdang yanxu - Zhongguo Gongqingtuan zhengzhi gongneng de yige kaocha shijiao*), 组织资本与政党延续 - 中国共青团政治功能的一个考察视角)," 214.

<sup>194</sup> See in particular : Cheng Li and David Bachman, "Localism, Elitism, and Immobilism: Elite Formation and Social Change in Post-Mao China," *World Politics* 42, no. 01 (1989): 64–94; Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China*, 284.

has been repeatedly put forward. But the mechanisms explaining this increasingly important role in elite renewal are surprisingly understudied.

While the organization itself has not been the focus of recent research, several China scholars, in particular Cheng Li and Bo Zhiyue, have explained the rise of former CYL cadres through the lens of factional politics. According to this perspective, princelings have been facing since the early 2000s an increasing powerful *tuanpai* (团派) faction, constituted of former CYL officials and supposedly led by Hu Jintao, the former general secretary of the CCP, who was secretary of the CYL in the 1980s.<sup>195</sup> Cheng Li described it as a group of like-minded officials, particularly interested in social policy.<sup>196</sup>

This pekinological literature is interesting in detailing the supposed personal relationships between a few Chinese top officials.<sup>197</sup> Still, it remains mostly speculative. In the case of the *tuanpai*, the lack of data makes it impossible to capture the exchanges supposedly taking place between Hu Jintao and his followers. We do not know to what extent he used the CYL as a factional weapon to win power and in which way he helped the so-called *tuanpai* members to get promoted. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, it is problematic to rely solely on group identity, being familial or organizational, to explain political choices. In fact, why would princelings or former CYL officials necessarily have common interests? Overall, a study of the organization itself, and the actual content of these cadres' experiences while working at the

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<sup>195</sup> See in particular: Bo, *China's Elite Politics Political Transition and Power Balancing*; Cheng Li, "New Provincial Chiefs: Hu's Groundwork for the 17th Party Congress," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 13 (2005); Cheng Li, "The New Bipartisanship within the Chinese Communist Party," *Orbis* 49, no. 3 (June 2005): 387–400; Li, "The Chinese Communist Party: Recruiting and Controlling the New Elites."

<sup>196</sup> Li, "The Chinese Communist Party: Recruiting and Controlling the New Elites," 25.

<sup>197</sup> Pekinology is, by reference to the Kremlinology, the study of the Chinese political elites' comings and goings, and of the murky struggles at the top of the Party-State hierarchy.

CYL, would be needed to understand the mechanisms at play and why they might develop, or not, common goals.

In addition, the like-mindedness of CYL officials put forward by Cheng Li cannot be explained through a generational analysis. In Karl Mannheim's definition of the term, a political generation is not a purely age-based phenomenon but it becomes "sociologically significant only when it also involves participation in the same historical and social circumstances."<sup>198</sup> However, the whole post-Mao era saw a multitude of defining moments and historical circumstances, such as economic reforms, the Tiananmen movement and its repression, etc. While an analysis in terms of generation has been applied to the study of other groups of Chinese youth, such as the "lost generation"<sup>199</sup> – constituted of the urban educated young Chinese sent to work in the countryside between 1968 and 1980 – or the "red guard generation,"<sup>200</sup> and used to demonstrate how a common historical experience transformed individual trajectories, it can hardly be applied to the CYL officials. Over the period, the variety of CYL officials cannot be grouped within one generational group. Even when using the political generations defined by the Chinese Party-State itself, these cadres can be found in several of them. Li Keqiang, PRC Premier since 2013 and former CYL leader, is for instance part of the fifth generation, while Hu Jintao who was PRC President between 2004 and 2012 and leader of the CYL in the 1980s, is part of the fourth.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*. (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1952), 298.

<sup>199</sup> Michel Bonnin, *The Lost Generation: the Rustication of China's Educated Youth (1968-1980)*, trans. Krystyna Horko (The Chinese University Press, 2013).

<sup>200</sup> Guobin Yang, *The Red Guard Generation and Political Activism in China*, (Columbia University Press, 2016).

<sup>201</sup> On Chinese political generations as defined by the Party-State, see : Li, "Jiang Zemin's Successors: The Rise of the Fourth Generation of Leaders in the PRC."

The various articles published by Kou Chien-Wen on the political mobility function of the CYL stand as an exception as they focus on the organization itself.<sup>202</sup> For Kou, two effects are playing at the same time and explain the rise of CYL affiliates: a factional effect and an organizational one. As the CCP's reserve force, the CYL provides a continuous pool of talents which are potentially absorbed by the *tuanpai faction*.

Kou's "organizational effect," however, remains unspecified. For him, it is mainly a matter of age:<sup>203</sup> CYL leaders come out of the organization with an age advantage. Kou argued that due to the step-by-step promotion system and the limited number of positions, such an advantage is decisive to get to top positions in the Chinese system. While the age argument is important, and I come back to this issue on Chapter Two, Kou's analysis has two major limitations. First, he does not explain the political rationale behind the decision to give such a career advantage to CYL cadres. It is unclear why the CYL became more important for elite renewal after the reforms, as compared to the Maoist era. He treats this evolution as a mechanical result of the institutionalization of rules in the CCP, whereas I argue that these rules reflect politically motivated decisions. Second, Kou never accounts for who the CYL cadres are, why they are given such an advantage early on, and what actually happens to them while in the CYL. Finally, Kou mainly focuses on the high level CYL officials, forgetting what might happen at the lower levels of the organization and during the earlier steps of their career,

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<sup>202</sup> Kou Chien-Wen (寇健文), "The Chinese Communist Youth League and China's Elite Recruitment (*Gongqingtuan yu Zhonggong zhengzhi jingying de zhenbu: tuan zhongyang changwei shitu fazhan diaocha*, 共青團與中共政治精英的甄補：團中央常委仕途發展調查)," *Mainland China Studies* 44, no. 9 (2001): 1–26; Kou, "CYL Cadres Rising in the Era of Hu Jintao: Factional Considerations or Organizational Mission of Channeling Cadres"; Kou Chien-Wen (寇健文), "CYL Cadres Rising in the Era of Hu Jintao: Factional Networking or Organization's Mission (*Hu Jintao shidai tuanxi ganbu de jueqi: paixi kaoliang vs. ganbu shusong de zuzhi renwu*, 胡錦濤時代團系幹部的崛起：派系考量vs.幹部輸送的組織任務)," *Prospect Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (2007): 49–95; Chien-Wen Kou, "The Rise of Youth League Affiliates and Their Paths to the Top," in *Choosing China's Leaders*, ed. Chien-Wen Kou and Xiaowei Zang (London ; New York: Routledge, 2014), 142–64; Chien-wen Kou and Wen-Hsuan Tsai, "Sprinting with Small Steps' Towards Promotion: Solutions for the Age Dilemma in the CCP Cadre Appointment System," *The China Journal* 71, no. 1 (2014): 153–71.

<sup>203</sup> See in particular : Kou and Tsai, "Sprinting with Small Steps' Towards Promotion: Solutions for the Age Dilemma in the CCP Cadre Appointment System."

especially in terms of political commitment formation. More specifically, the massive presence of the CYL in universities is completely put aside, even though this is a key place for political recruitment in China.<sup>204</sup>

### c) The Communist Youth League on campus

Different studies have mentioned the importance of the first steps of political professionalization within universities for one's future career in the Chinese Party-State.<sup>205</sup> However, no systematic study of this phenomenon, and the role played by the CCP's youth organizations, has been written. The literature on youth organizations on campus has so far mainly focused on the control function of these organizations over students' activities, and how this control capacity has fluctuated overtime, leaving aside the issue of political commitment formation on campus.

Dingxing Zhao and Xueliang Ding have both written on the declining control capacity of the CYL and other youth organizations on campus before the Tiananmen movement. According to Zhao, the CCP's youth organizations on campus became "amphibious" in the 1980s: some officials "captured student control institutions to spread nonconformist ideologies."<sup>206</sup> Ding also noted that campus branches of the CYL organized reformists conference and supported liberal journals.<sup>207</sup> In addition to providing them with mobilization capabilities, according to Wasserstrom, as well as Francis, the youth organization on campus

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<sup>204</sup> On Party recruitment on campus, see : Gang Guo, "Party Recruitment of College Students in China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, no. 43 (May 2005): 371–93.

<sup>205</sup> See in particular regarding Tsinghua University : Cheng Li, "University Networks and the Rise of Qinghua Graduates in China's Leadership," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 32 (July 1994): 1–30; Balme, *Entre soi: l'élite du pouvoir dans la Chine contemporaine [Self-segregation: the power elite in contemporary China]*, 267.

<sup>206</sup> Dingxin Zhao, "Decline of Political Control in Chinese Universities and the Rise of the 1989 Chinese Student Movement," *Sociological Perspectives* 40, no. 2 (January 1997): 170.

<sup>207</sup> Xueliang Ding, *The Decline of Communism in China: Legitimacy Crisis, 1977-1989* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 99.

helped develop the students' political culture.<sup>208</sup> All this eventually facilitated the 1989 movement<sup>209</sup>.

In a recent article, Yan Xiaojun showed that from the 1990s on, the CCP's youth organizations retook control over students' activities on campus. According to him the CYL and the student union exercise a thorough grip over students' life on campus.<sup>210</sup> He also described that, in addition to the professional CYL cadres, universities count numerous "student cadres" (*xuesheng ganbu*, 学生干部) who work within the CYL or other youth organizations. While the value of such an experience for a future political career is mentioned by Yan for the current period, no systematic study of the matter has been done.<sup>211</sup>

While the student cadres were not the focus of my initial research plan, I discovered during my fieldwork how important this experience is for a student's political future and chose to integrate it. This first experience as a cadre, while in college, came out as a decisive moment in the development of a commitment to a political career. Focusing on the student cadres in college appeared even more relevant as, since the reforms of the 1980s, the large majority of officials go to university,<sup>212</sup> which makes it a determining arena in terms of career choice.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Corinna-Barbara Francis, "The Institutional Roots of Student Political Culture : Official Student Politics at Beijing University," in *Chinese Education: Problems, Policies, and Prospects*, ed. Irving Epstein (New York: Garland Pub., 1991), 394–415; Jeffrey N Wasserstrom and Xinyong Liu, "Student Associations and Mass Movements," in *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: The Potential for Autonomy and Community in Post-Mao China*, ed. Deborah Davis et al. ([Washington, D.C.]; Cambridge [England]; New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press ; Cambridge University Press, 1995), 362–93.

<sup>209</sup> Zhao, "Decline of Political Control in Chinese Universities and the Rise of the 1989 Chinese Student Movement"; Ding, *The Decline of Communism in China: Legitimacy Crisis, 1977-1989*; Wasserstrom and Liu, "Student Associations and Mass Movements."

<sup>210</sup> Xiaojun Yan, "Engineering Stability: Authoritarian Political Control over University Students in Post-Deng China," *The China Quarterly* 218 (2014): 493–513.

<sup>211</sup> Francis, "The Institutional Roots of Student Political Culture : Official Student Politics at Beijing University"; Yan, "Engineering Stability: Authoritarian Political Control over University Students in Post-Deng China."

<sup>212</sup> Already in 1998, 80.5% of leading cadres had a higher education degree (Brødsgaard, "Management of Party Cadres in China," 70.

<sup>213</sup> As most officials go to university, middle schools and high schools are not the political selection arenas they used to be during the Mao era. As I develop in the Second Part of the dissertation, they are less relevant to the issue of political elite renewal and I only superficially studied the role played by the CYL in these institutions. On

Overall, a comprehensive study of the CYL at different levels of the polity constitutes a novel way to shed light on the issues of elite renewal and commitment formation in post-Mao China. The different levels of analysis allow us to focus on the different stages of a cadre's career, from the starting point of professionalization on campus to the beginning of a national career at the central level CYL.

### ***E - Research Question and Hypotheses***

The main research question driving this dissertation is: how does the Chinese Party-State renew its political elite and maintain its cohesion in the post-Mao era? By focusing on this specific issue, I address the gaps I mentioned in the literature on post-Mao Chinese politics. Relying on various strands of literature, both on post-Mao China and comparative cases, I bring out the political features of the communist bureaucracy at the nexus of formality and informality, and I highlight how it cultivates individual commitment beyond ideological attachment. In the answer I provide, I unveil in particular the role played by the Party's youth organizations.

First, I hypothesize that the Party-State leaders created a sponsored mobility system to renew the Chinese political elite. Through the various steps of the sponsored mobility process, the young recruits develop a political commitment to their career in the Party-State and to the survival of the regime. The opposite hypothesis would be that the Party-State, instead of recruiting young people and progressively cultivating them for high level positions, renews its elite by coopting young professionals who already have a career outside the administration, and therefore takes advantage of the skills they have acquired from their previous experiences. This is for instance what happened in the USSR under Khrushchev (1953-1964). During that period,

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high schools and middle schools during the Mao era, see : Jonathan Unger, *Education under Mao: Class and Competition in Canton Schools, 1960-1980* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Susan L Shirk, *Competitive Comrades: Career Incentives and Student Strategies in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Anita Chan, *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985).



the Soviet elite was renewed through the cooptation of professionals with technical skills rather than by recruiting young cadres who spent their whole career in the Party-State.<sup>214</sup> As a result, the Party's main youth organization, the Komsomol, which role was to focus on the recruitment of young people, played a limited role in the elite renewal process. Gehlen showed that in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee, the number of central and local Party leaders who previously had a position in the Komsomol went from 34% in 1952 to 8% in 1968.<sup>215</sup>

To test my first hypothesis, which stands in contrast to the Soviet case, I analyze to what extent the Chinese Communist Youth League played a role in the renewal of the Party's elite since the 1980s, and if it became more important than during the Mao era. In line with this hypothesis, I question the specific political configuration that led Chinese leaders, at the central but also local levels, to rely on a sponsored mobility process and the CYL for elite renewal, in opposition to Khrushchev's strategy. Finally, I explore to what extent political commitment developed early in one's career is rewarded in terms of future opportunities. By opposition to the idea that political considerations are not important in the selection of Chinese officials, I hypothesize that the recruits who developed a political commitment early on, through the Party's youth organizations, are put on a specific promotion path, which includes specific opportunities and trainings, in line with the elite dualism theory. By acting as a career accelerator, the youth organizations attract young talents and at the same time allow the CCP to nurture the recruits' commitment over a long time-period.

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<sup>214</sup> Frederic J Fleron, "System Attributes and Career Attributes: The Soviet Political Leadership System, 1952 to 1965," in *Comparative Communist Political Leadership*, by Carl Beck et al. (New York: D. McKay Co., 1973), 58; H el ene Carr ere d'Encausse, *Le pouvoir confisqu e: gouvernants et gouvern es en U.R.S.S. [Confiscated power: rulers and ruled in USSR]* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), 243.

<sup>215</sup> Gehlen referred here to the apparatchiki in the Central Committee, who include the Central Committee members who were Party secretaries at the central, republic or province levels. Michael P Gehlen, "The Soviet Apparatchiki," in *Political Leadership in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. Barry R Farrell (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1970), 143.

Second, I hypothesize that the Party's youth organizations play a key role in the first steps of the sponsored mobility process starting from college, linking from the beginning the youth's political commitment to the Party-State organizations rather than specific individuals or the universities themselves. This contrasts with other models of sponsored mobility in which the education institutions play the role of political promotions channels, separated from the Party and its organizations. This was the situation during the Institutional Revolutionary Party regime in Mexico (1929-2000). The key role played by institutions of higher education in terms of political networking and political recruitment, went with a decline of the Party's role in this matter.<sup>216</sup> To test this hypothesis, I analyze the importance of CCP's youth organizations on campus and interrogate the role they play in commitment formation, political networking and political recruitment. I explore to what extent the students who go through these organizations at the university level develop a commitment to a political career by endorsing a specific social role as future officials and by transforming their social circles. I also study to what extent they have, or not, more opportunities than other students in terms of future political career.

Third, I hypothesize that the decentralized nature of the Party-State and its youth organizations make it difficult for the young recruits to establish cohesive groups which could organize against the Party-State itself. This hypothesis contrasts with the idea that an overall faction is developed throughout the CYL, constituted of officials with common goals and interests. To test this hypothesis, I question the cohesion and autonomy of the CYL as a network of officials. I interrogate to what extent this network is constitutive of their career and lead them to develop common interests, or if it is only one connection among a multiplicity of crosscutting ties.

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<sup>216</sup> Roderic A Camp, "The Political Technocrat in Mexico and the Survival of the Political System," *Latin American Research Review* 20, no. 1 (1985): 97-118.

To test these hypotheses, this research combines different levels of analysis, the one of the regime and its evolution, the one of the youth organizations and their rules, and the perspective of the recruits and recruiters at the different echelons of the Chinese polity. Rather than focusing on one set of independent and abstract hypotheses, and aim for a unidirectional causal inference, I get into the multiplicity of causes and influences in order to develop a holistic analysis of the role played by the CCP's youth organizations in elite renewal and cohesion in post-Mao China.

## ***F - Research Design***

### **1) Research methods**

I relied on mixed methods to assess the evolution of the CYL as a path to power in post-Mao China. In addition to primary and secondary written sources to account for the evolution of the organization since 1949, I combined descriptive statistics about the cadres' professional trajectories with semi-structured interviews with the concerned actors to better reconstruct the careers, and the commitment formation process, of CYL officials since 1978. In total I spent fourteen months doing fieldwork in China between 2011 and 2015.

#### **a) Career data**

To study the elite renewal function of the CYL, I relied on already compiled career data, such as the data base regarding the CCP Central Committee members put together by Shih et. al.,<sup>217</sup> and developed my own datasets. Based on official resumes, I collected career data on CYL leaders at the national level from 1949 until 2015 (set of 74 cases). In addition, I gathered career information on the leaders of all the provincial CYL committees between 1978 and 2015

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<sup>217</sup> The data base can be found here: <http://faculty.washington.edu/cadolph/index.php?page=61> (consulted on January 27 2016).

(set of 356 cases). I also compiled biographical data regarding CYL secretaries in two universities based in Beijing in which I did fieldwork, Peking University and Tsinghua University (42 cases for the 1949-2015 period). Finally, I coded the career trajectories of student leaders at the national level (set of 140 cases for the 1979-2000 period) and the same two universities (128 cases for 1949-2013). The name lists of these officials and student leaders came from a variety of official and non-official online sources,<sup>218</sup> which I crosschecked with other lists and verified through interviews. The career data itself was found in official resumes, available on *Xinhua.cn*, or in the ones compiled by *baidu.baiké*, a Chinese version of *Wikipedia*, at the condition that their positions were sourced from media reports and official websites. The data being missing for some individuals, I had to treat them as not having pursued an official career.

Overall, this data was useful to trace the variety of careers youth organization leaders can go through and to provide an overall image on the extent to which they pursue a political career and get promoted to top positions. It was also key in addressing the issue of the evolution of the function played by these organization as promotion channels within the Party-State

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<sup>218</sup> The official name list for central CYL secretaries can be found here: “Previous sessions of the central CYL (*lijie tuan zhongyang*, 历届团中央),” Website of the PRC Government ([http://www.gov.cn/test/2006-01/27/content\\_173796\\_6.htm](http://www.gov.cn/test/2006-01/27/content_173796_6.htm), consulted on 15 June 2016). Regarding provincial level CYL leaders, no official name list exists for the period, however several unofficial ones can be found on the internet, I cross examined them and verified them with local CYL officials (See in particular: [http://wenku.baidu.com/link?url=pg3Z-9wNGpnu\\_KwwZTp3JhPgnOVgF1PmAe8qKkHUy8OmhmITp3LgJeleRAXjb\\_CTQMSQ-bFXmj117HfGt2qS0LpY\\_NsSif12N\\_SrCWVkvN7](http://wenku.baidu.com/link?url=pg3Z-9wNGpnu_KwwZTp3JhPgnOVgF1PmAe8qKkHUy8OmhmITp3LgJeleRAXjb_CTQMSQ-bFXmj117HfGt2qS0LpY_NsSif12N_SrCWVkvN7), Consulted on 18 August 216). For the former CYL secretaries of Peking University and Tsinghua University, several name lists can be found on the internet (See in particular : <http://blog.renren.com/share/36924648/3903186873>, consulted on 1 June 2016), I cross examined them and verified them with university officials and older lists published by the two universities (Fang Huijian (方惠坚) and Zhang Sijing (张思敬), eds., *Local Records of Tsinghua University (Qinghua daxue zhi*, 清华大学志), vol. 1 (Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2001), 879; Peking University Youth League Committee, *The Communist Youth League in Peking University (Gongqingtuan zai Beida*, 共青团在北大) (Beijing: People’s Press, 2004), 358–388. Finally, regarding student leaders (student union chairmen and chairwomen) in Tsinghua University and Peking University, several name lists can be found on the internet (See in particular for Tsinghua University: <http://baike.baidu.com/view/3751112.htm>, and for Peking University: <http://baike.baidu.com/view/2394305.htm>, both Consulted on 1 June 2016). The official name lists of the All-China Student Federation leaders since 1949 was found here: Li Yan (李艳) and Min Xiaoyi (闵小益), eds., *Compilation of Historical Documents from the Past Congresses of the All-China Student Federation (quanguo xuelian lici daibiao dahui shiliaoji*, 全国学联历次代表大会史料集), vol. 2 (Beijing: Chinese Literature and History Press, 2011).

hierarchy. However, such biographical data remains thin to understand the different mechanisms at play in terms of recruitment and promotion. The role played by a cadre's personal network is for instance particularly hard to address. In addition, official resumes can often be altered strategically by an official or an organization to appear more legitimate, in particular in an authoritarian context. To reconstruct the individuals' careers, this official data was compared with the information acquired through interviews.

### **b) Interviews**

A set of 121 semi-structured interviews with 92 actors constitutes the foundation of this study (I met several times with several interviewees).<sup>219</sup> I mainly interviewed current or former CYL cadres (44 cases) and student-cadres (24 cases). As much as possible, I targeted officials of different ranks within the organization and who have worked at different time periods during the post-Mao era. In addition to the cadres per se, I interviewed several academics (24 cases) either from the Central CYL School, who oversee the training of CYL cadres, or from the different universities in which I did fieldwork. These interviews have a specific status as these academics are not the actors I am directly interested in. Their comments and the information they may have shared with me was never used in its own right, unless it was related to the university in which they were working. While their thoughts on the CYL or officials more broadly were very useful, it was never taken for granted and always checked through the interaction with the actors themselves. In terms of gender, 22 interviewees are female, while 70 are male. The age range is very large, from 20 to 80 years old, as some of my interviews were still student cadres in college while others were retired academics or officials.

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<sup>219</sup> See Appendix I for a full list of interviewees and dates of encounters. All the interviewees were anonymized.

Semi-structured interviews are an important device to establish the role of agency in recruitment and promotion processes. In addition to providing important and sometimes hidden information, they give access to the perceptions of officials themselves regarding their biography, beyond the flat information displayed in their resumes. It is therefore a perfect tool to analyze one's career in the interactionist sense of the word. As argued by Becker, having the actors themselves describe their trajectory is a good method to get to the progressive way in which they developed their career, and how it was influenced by their perception of obstacles and opportunities.<sup>220</sup> In particular, it offers a vantage point to analyze how they developed their individual strategies within the framework of their organization and how they perceived their options, including exit options, across different points in time. In addition, through the way they present themselves and talk about other cadres and non-cadres, we can appraise their role and status as officials or future officials and examine how they embody it. The description of their relationships with colleagues and non-colleagues overtime is also important to better grasp how their social circle evolved and how it influences, and is influenced, by their political commitment.

However, we cannot stop the analysis at the actors' narrative of their own trajectory. As underlined by Bourdieu, the "biographic illusion" leads actors to present their life as if every action made perfect sense and aimed at an overarching goal. To prevent such teleological approach to individual trajectories, the different steps of the careers must be analyzed in their own right, not as a necessary stage towards a predefined target.<sup>221</sup> The researcher has to

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<sup>220</sup> Howard S. Becker, "Biographie et mosaïque scientifique [Biography and scientific patchwork]," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 62, no. 1 (1986): 105–10.

<sup>221</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "L'illusion biographique [The biographical illusion]," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 62, no. 1 (1986): 69–72.

reconstruct the context surrounding the individual's choices and contrast them with the choice of individuals in different situations, to identify their specificity and logic.

To better understand how commitment to social role and to social groups influences political commitment, the trajectories of the most committed must be analyzed in contrast with those who chose a different path. Among my interviewees, several of them had an experience in the Party's youth organizations, generally as student cadres, but did not pursue a political career. In addition to providing me with insights regarding organizations that they know well even though they do not feel committed to it anymore, such individuals constituted a sort of control group. The contrast in terms of social role and social practices highlighted the specificity of the politically committed individuals.

To investigate the mechanisms at play and the context surrounding my interviewees' life decisions, I made the choice of a site-intensive method with a snowball sampling strategy. It allowed me to get into the details of the young cadres' recruitment and promotion process in the selected locales and to analyze how the characteristics of every local context influenced the actors' tactics and commitment formation. Though the relatively small size of my sample limits the external validity of the study, a site-intensive approach is the best way to explore organizational mechanisms and actors' perceptions. Across the different sites, the replication of interviews enabled me to distinguish an isolated act from a common one.

To be sure, the choice of a limited set of fieldwork sites was also linked to the difficulty of accessing information. Yet, what I lose in quantity, I earned in quality. The repeated encounters with my interviewees in the same locale favored the development of relationships based on trust and enabled me to go beyond the official discourse on the organization.

The interviews ran in average for an hour and a half and generally took part in the interviewees' office if they had one, or in public spaces, such as coffee shops. To not rebuke the interviewees and get more out of them, I did not record the interviews but took hand-written

notes. It gave an informal flavor to the encounter and I had the impression that the interviewees spoke more freely as a result, sometimes even asking not to take into note a personal comment given almost as a confidence. During the interviews, I mixed precise questions, to get the actual information of interest, with broader, more abstract interrogations about their organization or my research questions, to gather overall impressions. On several occasions, my respondents gave me new ideas and directions, which I pursued in later interviews. Rather than following a basic sampling logic and asking the same questions to a representative portion of the studied group, I aimed for saturation. Each time, I built on the previous interviews to prepare the next and achieve an increasingly accurate understanding of the question at hand.

I met my first group of interviewees mainly through academics and student cadres I contacted in different universities and in the Central CYL School. They were willing to help me because of preexisting personal connections, because they were interested in the research itself, or because they wanted to develop their personal network among foreign academia. They helped me to find several interviewees through their own contacts, which in turn introduced me to additional ones. Such introductions were important to get people to, at least partially, trust me and talk about their own career as well as their understanding of the recruitment processes. Some of the interviewees also allowed me to join them at official dinners or evaluation trips, where I could observe interactions among officials and meet more potential interviewees. This first encounter often smoothed things out when I formally asked them for an interview. Overall, I had to navigate the cadres' network myself to study it.

For around a third of the interviewees, we met repeatedly and had up to four interviews over the period of my fieldwork. In some cases, it was harder to develop such a relationship and several interviewees refused another meeting. More broadly, getting in touch with potential interviewees and getting them to accept the interview was not always easy, especially with higher ranked officials. As a result, my access to actors in the central level CYL administration



was largely limited to Central CYL School cadres and academics. Access was also limited due to circumstantial events such as the demotion for corruption of the Party leader of Nanjing City while I was doing fieldwork there, which made officials at all levels more cautious and less inclined to talk to foreigners, or the elections for student leaders in the various universities, a sensitive time during which university officials were less open to meet with me.

Beyond access to interviewees, it was sometimes hard to make them talk about certain issues. It was in particular the case with the issue of their own social background, as well as the question of personal ties in the administration and how it plays on promotions. I had to approach these issues indirectly, either getting into other cases they knew, or questioning them repeatedly about specific instances of socialization, such as training programs. In addition, the truthfulness or accuracy of specific information acquired through interviews was sometimes questionable; it was therefore systematically checked through a triangulation both across interviews and with documentary sources.

### **c) Primary written sources**

In addition to interviews and official biographical data, the consideration of a numbers of written sources has proven important to this research. First, diverse official documents, including Party State regulations and policy documents (sometimes disseminated through official websites or social media platforms), but also organizational yearbooks and local gazetteers gave precious standardized information regarding the functioning of the CYL and other youth organizations at different levels of the Chinese polity.

Second, internal documents regarding specific units were also useful to examine the most recent activity of the local units I studied, which was not recorded in the yearbooks yet. It also gave me a taste of the shape taken by the information flows within the organization and

how CYL cadres presented their activity to their superiors. Interviews were often the occasion to collect these documents, such as the cadres' activity reports or the unit's organigrams.

Finally, looking at press articles gave additional information, even beyond the studied locales. In addition to media reports coming from a variety of Chinese newspapers and websites, I systematically analyzed the content of the CYL's official daily newspaper, the *China Youth Daily*, between January 2012 and December 2015. The *China Youth Daily* articles were particularly useful to get information regarding the organization itself, at the central and local levels, including descriptions of meetings and activities, leaders' speeches, membership data... In addition to this organizational data, some pieces about specific activities, locales or individual cadres allowed me to draw parallels with the information I could get on my fieldwork sites. Overall, the media reports helped me assess the generalizability of my localized findings.

## **2) Fieldwork sites**

Beyond my focus on the central organization of the CYL, I chose to account for the situation of the CYL since the end of the Cultural Revolution in two provincial capitals and four universities. First I focus on the capital cities of two very different provinces: Jiangsu and Guizhou. Jiangsu is the fourth richest province-level locale in the country with a GDP per capita of 24,950 USD (PPP) in 2015, whereas Guizhou is the last one with 8,463 USD (PPP).<sup>222</sup> Through the comparative study of these two provinces I can account for similarities and make general claims regarding the recruitment and promotion processes, but I can also see how the organization adapts to local specificities, in particular to gaps in terms of economic development. Moreover, focusing on the provinces' capitals – Nanjing for Jiangsu and Guiyang for Guizhou – which centralize the province level and city level CYL committees as well as

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<sup>222</sup> Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China (<http://data.stats.gov.cn/english/>, consulted on 13 September 2016).

some grassroots units of the CYL, I could get into the relations between the different sub-levels of the League, and see how officials get transferred, or not, from one to another.

During my fieldwork, I spent in total ten months in Beijing (two weeks in the winter 2011, two in the summer 2012, one month in the summer 2013, four months in 2014 and four months in 2015), more than three months in Nanjing (two weeks in the winter 2011, two weeks in the summer 2012, two weeks in the summer 2013, and two months in 2015), and one month in Guiyang (during the winter 2015). In addition to these specific locales, I did additional interviews regarding the situation of the local CYL committees in Chengdu the capital of Sichuan Province as well as Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei Province. I went to these two cities as I had been introduced to local cadres through personal contacts. Such interviews helped me to compare my results to other local realities.

To test my hypothesis regarding the role played by the CYL and its sub-organizations within universities, I focused on four universities during my fieldwork. First, the two best schools in the country: Peking University and Tsinghua University. I chose these two universities as they are the ones providing the most Party-State leaders, and therefore contributing to elite renewal. Since 1982, 9% of the CCP Central Committee members have a degree from Peking University or Tsinghua University, as well as 15% of the CCP Politburo members.<sup>223</sup> Also, according to the website of the “Chinese Universities Alumni Association” (*Zhongguo xiaoyou hui*, 中国校友会), in 2007 Tsinghua University had the most alumni within the current political elite, with 41 officials within the CCP Central Committee or at the ministerial level and above. Peking University was second with 34 alumni in such positions.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Source: Data base compiled by Victor Shih et. al. (2012), which can be found here: <http://faculty.washington.edu/cadolph/index.php?page=61> (consulted on 1 June 2016).

<sup>224</sup> Wang Qian (王骞), “Beida Graduates in the Political Arena (*zhengzhi wutai shang de Beida biyesheng*, 政治舞台上的北大毕业生),” *Southern Weekend*, December 18, 2007.

Still, these universities are highly specific in terms of the career prospects they offer to students and are based in Beijing, close to the central administration. For the purpose of comparison, I chose to include in the sample two universities outside Beijing: one highly ranked, Nanjing University, and one of lesser rank, Nanjing Normal University.<sup>225</sup> Overall, these four universities remain part of the “211 Project,” which includes the one hundred or so best universities in the country.<sup>226</sup> I chose to focus on these elite schools as I am interested specifically in the recruitment of high level officials and the cultivation of their commitment. Students from other schools, and vocational ones in particular, have less political career opportunities.<sup>227</sup> To widen the scope of the comparison, I also did some complementary interviews in several universities in Beijing, Chengdu and Guiyang.

In addition to universities, I conducted isolated interviews with CYL cadres in other units, in particular in four state-owned enterprises (SOEs) based in Beijing, Nanjing and Guiyang, and two high schools in Nanjing. These units are not representative of SOEs or high schools throughout the country but these interviews allowed me to have a general sense of the role played by CYL and its officials in such units and to put into perspective the role the organization plays in universities. The CYL also has cells in the People’s Liberation Army, however I did not manage to obtain access to these units. Furthermore, the CYL units within

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<sup>225</sup> According to the 2015 ranking of national universities by the *CUAA-Team of China University Evaluation*, Nanjing University was ranked 8th whereas Nanjing Normal University was 48th (Source: <http://edu.people.com.cn/n/2014/1229/c391924-26293836.html>).

<sup>226</sup> For a synthetic explanation of the “211 project” (211 *gongcheng*, 211工程), see the website of the China Education Center: <http://www.chinaeducenter.com/en/cedu/ceduproject211.php> (Consulted on 12 May 2016).

<sup>227</sup> In 2008, 14% of the graduates from all the “211 project” universities got directly a position in a Party-State Administration or an Academic Institution, which includes both official and academic posts. By contrast, only 5% from vocational higher education institutions did. Source: Cheng Changqun (成长群), “Research on the Issue of Employment of University Students: Survey on the Issue of Hubei University Student Employment as a Case (*daxuesheng jiuye wenti yanjiu: yi Hubei daxuesheng jiuye diaocha weili*, 大学生就业问题研究:以湖北大学生就业调查为例)” (PhD Dissertation, Wuhan University, 2010), 98.

the military are not directly relevant to my study of political elite renewal, the political career and military ones being increasingly separated in post-Mao China.<sup>228</sup>

My field sites' selection strategy was targeting at having the best overall view on the role played by the CYL in terms of elite renewal and cohesion. Rather than selecting sites with very specific variations from one another to draw causal inference, I chose a "one-case multi-field-site approach," as presented by Maria Heimer. The idea is to treat the different sites as one case, which therefore allows a form of triangulation across sites in order to carefully analyze the mechanisms of interest. I could then play with the different sites, and administrative levels in each site, to cross check information and to rely on various networks of interviewees.<sup>229</sup> While I was not focusing on a specific variation, I chose field sites which were very different socioeconomically, for the sake of representativeness. Instead of basing my whole analysis on one specific site, I continually compared my observations in the different field sites in order to be able to separate singular contextual phenomena from shared mechanisms. Focusing on two cities and four universities offers a good balance in terms of breadth and depth of the study. It allowed me to contextualize my findings, but also to avoid what Hurst called, the "invalid part-to-whole mapping."<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> On this issue, see : Ji You, "The Roadmap of Upward Advancement for PLA Leaders," in *Choosing China's Leaders*, ed. Chien-Wen Kou and Xiaowei Zang (London ; New York: Routledge, 2014), 42–64.

<sup>229</sup> Maria Heimer, "Field Sites, Reseach Design and Type of Findings," in *Doing Fieldwork in China*, ed. Maria Heimer and Stig Thøgersen (Copenhagen; Abingdon: NIAS ; Marston [distributor], 2006), 58–77.

<sup>230</sup> William Hurst, "Cases, Questions and Comparison in Research on Contemporary Chinese Politics," in *Contemporary Chinese Politics: New Sources, Methods, and Field Strategies*, ed. Allen Carlson et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 162–77.

## ***G - Outline of the dissertation***

The dissertation is structured in three parts, themselves sub-divided in thematic chapters. The First Part is specific as its level of analysis differs greatly from the remaining of the text. While in the later parts I focus on individual cadres and their commitment formation, I adopt here a macroscopic perspective focusing on the evolution of the organization itself since the creation of its first cell in 1920. I unveil the historical continuities in the Youth League's structure and functioning since the Mao era. I also argue that despite these continuities, the League managed to evolve with the regime transformation by diversifying its activities and enlarging its domain of action through the development of sub-organizations. These adjustments allowed the organization to maintain its monopoly over the management of youth affairs. Overall, I argue that while the CYL organizational nature and relationship to the CCP did not fundamentally change, it played an increasing role in elite renewal since the 1980s, in a context of elite struggle and overall rejuvenation of the Party-State. Paradoxically, it is when the regime reforms itself and becomes less orthodox in its ideology that this classic communist organization gains in political importance, situating itself at the nexus of the Party-State's sponsored mobility system.

The second and third parts of the dissertation focus on individual cadres and their commitment formation. They are organized following the different steps of the political career: being recruited as a student cadre, being selected as a student leader, being appointed as a CYL official and promoted within the university administration, and finally rising to leading positions within the CYL at the central or local level. This sequence is not a necessary one since most student cadres never pursue a political career, and a lot of CYL cadres only go through part of these steps. However, these steps logically follow each other and represent an ideal-type of a rising trajectory within the Party's youth organizations.

In the Second Part, I unveil the mechanisms of political sponsored mobility in China starting with the key role played by the CCP youth organizations on campus. I show that becoming a student cadre and getting promotion within these organizations on campus is a key primary phase in a personal trajectory towards officialdom. Through this experience, the students are subjected to different commitment building mechanisms. As they rise in the hierarchy, they learn to cultivate and enjoy their role as future Party-State officials, which strengthen their commitment to a political career. Most importantly, the student cadres' experience transforms their social circles, which progressively reinforce their political commitment. The student cadre experience can also lead the cadres to stay on campus and become CYL officials. I underline how this first job on campus can also be used as a springboard for political office for the less risk-averse and the most ambitious recruits. Overall, by unveiling the different steps of the political commitment process which takes place on campus, Part II of the dissertation highlights the decisive role played by universities in political recruitment in China.

After focusing on the first steps of the political career on campus, both before and after graduation, I turn in the Third Part to the local and central CYL officials themselves. I argue that the CYL is a key nexus in the political trajectory of an official, often in continuity with the first step of the career presented in the previous part of the dissertation. Focusing on CYL leaders in particular, both at the central and local levels, I show that the generalist feature of their job sets them apart from more specialized officials, working in sectorial administrations for instance. In the CYL, they learn to become generalist leaders. This accounts for the survival of generalist cadres in the Chinese system by opposition to the literature describing an overall technocratization of the regime. I also highlight the gap within the CYL between leading cadres and non-leading cadres, and the different personal trajectories it entails. The leading cadres can often use the Party-State's rules to their advantage. They also develop particularly diverse

personal networks as they rotate quickly from one position to the next. As a result, I argue that the multiple experience these cadres have lead them to develop various cross-cuttings personal ties, across administrations and locales, making it harder to organize in unit-based factional groups with clear common interests.

## ***H - Main arguments***

### **1) Sponsored mobility and the reward of commitment**

I show in the dissertation that the Chinese Party-State political elite is recruited through a sponsored mobility system which strengthen their commitment to their political career and to the system. Comparison with other post-revolutionary regimes, and the USSR in particular, allowed to highlight the Chinese specificity in that matter. It showed in particular that the role played by political youth organizations highly varies depending on the political configuration and the leadership's strategy. I stress that the development of this system was possible because the interests of the leader at the specific point in time was aligned with the regime's requirements in terms of elite renewal in a post-crisis situation (i.e. after the Cultural Revolution). By developing the circumstances which led to the development of this sponsored mobility system, I contribute to the literature on the diversity and flexibility of post-revolutionary regimes, but also on the literature more broadly on political parties and the role played by youth organizations in leadership renewal.

#### **a) The political origins of an age-based cadre management system**

The importance of the Party's youth organizations in political mobility originates from post-Cultural Revolution politics. Deng Xiaoping and his allies had to cultivate a support base of young officials to counter the rise of young activists promoted under Mao. After ten years of Cultural Revolution, during which intellectuals were targeted and persecuted, he could not rely



on the cooptation of educated professionals and specialists, like Khrushchev had done in the post-Stalin years. Deng therefore launched an overall rejuvenation policy to promote young officials who would support him. Age-based rules were established for the recruitment and promotion of officials at every echelon of the Party-State. The PRC became the only Leninist regime to develop a strict system of age rules for its officials. The institutionalization of these rules made permanent the rejuvenation impetus started by Deng, even after the political need for young supporters was satisfied. The institutionalization of an age-based cadre management system established a sponsored mobility system and led, over the years, to an overall renewal of the Party-State elite. It prevented the CCP to become a gerontocracy.

Under this new configuration, the CYL took an unprecedented role as a career accelerator for young officials. This is true in comparison to the Mao era, but also to the Soviet situation. While activism or lower level positions in the Komsomol, the Soviet CYL, were often formative experience in the soviet cadres' careers, it never played such a key role as a promotion channel to leadership positions.<sup>231</sup> It was never a major tool in the rejuvenation of the Party-State top echelon. The number of Party leaders with an experience in the Komsomol even drastically decreased in the post-Stalin era.<sup>232</sup>

### **b) Commitment and career building**

Beyond elite renewal itself, the sponsored mobility system established by the CCP facilitates elite cohesion by cultivating individual recruits' political commitment. At every step of their career in the CYL, individuals are transformed by the organization. Their social circles

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<sup>231</sup> According to Solnick: "Top leaders often derived their only experiences in street-level bureaucracy from their days in the Young Communist League" (Solnick, *Stealing the State: Control and Collapse in Soviet Institutions*, 43. See also: Jeffrey Klugman, *The New Soviet Elite: How They Think & What They Want* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 22.

<sup>232</sup> Gehlen, "The Soviet Apparatchiki," 143.

are increasingly narrowed down to the organization's insiders. In line with the concept of *cathetic-cohesion commitment* developed in the Introduction, personal attachment to the members of the group leads individuals to remain in the organization, even though its actions or values change overtime. The actors I focus on also cultivate a specific social role, first as officials-to-be while in college, and later as future political leaders. Their behavior increasingly reflects their status and political affiliation: they learn to speak and behave as leading officials. This phenomenon echoes the concept of *cognitive-continuance commitment* developed by Kanter. The individuals invest so much of their time and energy in the organization that it transforms their behavior. On the long run, they become so attached to their social role that exit becomes unlikely.<sup>233</sup>

While these two forms of commitment account for one's decision to remain part of an organization, they only partially explain behavioral conformity within it. To the extent that it is accepted by the organization, or unknown by other members, and that it does not endanger his membership, the individual might slightly bend or challenge the rules. This is very different from an ideology-based commitment, which would lead the indoctrinated members to follow, at all costs, the direction given by the organization and its leaders. In the case of the Chinese Party-State and the cadres I follow, this type of commitment linked to one's investment in a role and attachment to the group, explain that they remain officials on the long run, but also that they sometimes indulge in corruption or nepotism for example. Through the first steps of the sponsored mobility process the young cadres prove their commitment to the Party, rather than to an overarching ideology.

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<sup>233</sup> On these two types of commitment, see the Introduction. See also: Kanter, "Commitment and Social Organization: A Study of Commitment Mechanisms in Utopian Communities."

### c) The political elite plays by different rules

Individual commitment is rewarded career-wise. The committed young recruits are put on a specific promotion path towards leading positions in the Party-State. This path includes unique training, networking and promotion opportunities. Being considered as leaders in the making, they transfer quickly from one leading position to the next and develop their personal network, but also generalist skills and political role. They use unique organizational shortcuts in order to rotate as quickly as possible. They rarely go through the civil servant exams, and often only partially follow the rules regarding step-by-step promotion and cadre tenure. The Party-State is rather tolerant towards rule-bending with regards to leading cadres. It is all the more important because, as I showed in Chapter Two, it is impossible to follow the rules and get to the top Party-State positions without shortcuts. The Party-State's capacity to bend the rules when useful is in line with the "guerilla policy style" described by Perry and Heilmann. The Party-State uses its institutional plasticity in order to better adapt to changing configurations, like in guerilla warfare.<sup>234</sup>

The specific situation of these young recruits results in a dual-track system, separating them from ordinary cadres early in their career. It echoes the literature on elite dualism that I discussed in the Introduction. However, this literature separates State positions from Party ones, and the key divide in our case is instead between leading and non-leading cadres. The leading cadres are at every level, or in every unit, the few top officials, holding either Party or State positions. In a county level administration for example, it includes the Party secretary and deputy secretaries, but also the county governor and vice-governors. Political features are important in the selection of all Party-State officials: the ones set on a sponsored path to leading

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<sup>234</sup> Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J Perry, "Embracing Uncertainty: Guerrilla Policy Style and Adaptive Governance in China," in *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China*, ed. Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J Perry (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2011), 1–29.

positions go through a particularly long and transformative commitment process which makes them highly reliable from their recruiters' perspective.

It is therefore the process of political commitment building they have been through that separates these elite cadres from the others. The political elements of the recruitment process should not however overshadow the constant competition these officials face at every step of their career. They constitute a pool among which only a handful can, for instance, rise to the Party's Central Committee. While the promotion criteria are very different from an ideal Weberian merit-based bureaucracy, it does not mean that these officials are inapt. They may be less technically trained than other officials, but they have to be skillful in bureaucratic infighting. They must be able to convince their superiors at every echelon of their commitment but also their efficiency. All in all, they have to develop and showcase abilities that are close to the ones necessary to young politicians in an electoral democracy aspiring to be part of a ministerial cabinet or to rise within a party's hierarchy.<sup>235</sup>

The CYL plays a key role in this sponsored mobility framework as it is often the site where cadres develop their commitment to a political career, and because it is widely used as a career accelerator. In that regard, the function played by the CYL can be compared to the position of "midshipman" developed by the British navy in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to Elias, the navy created this position as a hierarchically neutral ground where young trainees could efficiently learn nautical skills without lowering the status of the young aristocrats. This was possible by playing with etiquette and posting them neither behind nor before the mast but at mid-ship. The navy was ready to bend the rules to meet both the young recruits' interest in terms of status, but also its own objectives in training its officers.<sup>236</sup> The CYL plays a similar

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<sup>235</sup> Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*, 58.

<sup>236</sup> René Moelker, "Norbert Elias, Maritime Supremacy and the Naval Profession: On Elias' Unpublished Studies in the Genesis of the Naval Profession," *British Journal of Sociology* *British Journal of Sociology* 54, no. 3 (2003):

role in the Chinese political system: it represents an interesting opportunity from the recruits' perspective as it goes together with advantageous career options, and at the same time it fits the Party-State's needs in terms of cadres' loyalty, nurtured through a long commitment process and the insertion in a dense network of relationships. The CYL therefore attracts young talents and at the same time allows the CCP to cultivate the recruits' commitment over a long time-period.

## **2) It all starts on campus**

By analyzing the role played by the Party's youth organizations in college I showed how important higher education institutions are for political recruitment in post-Mao China. This is often overlooked as Chinese students have largely been described as apolitical since 1989.<sup>237</sup> It is in fact in college that the sponsored mobility process for future officials generally starts, and especially the cultivation of their political commitment.

While the political role of universities is far from being a Chinese specificity, its uniqueness resides in the level of structuration displayed by youth political organizations on campus. The CYL and its sub-organizations oversee the recruitment and cultivation of young cadres across the country's universities. Starting from the first year of college and up to a potential first job as an official on campus, the individual trajectories are therefore integrated into a highly managed system of political mobility. This organizational continuity facilitates the constant screening and selection of cadres. The most committed ones are then provided with advantages in terms of recruitment in graduate school or starting a political career.

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370–90; Norbert Elias, "Studies in the Genesis of the Naval Profession," *The British Journal of Sociology* 1, no. 4 (December 1, 1950): 291–309.

<sup>237</sup> Yan, "Engineering Stability: Authoritarian Political Control over University Students in Post-Deng China," 2.

### **3) The Party-State's segmentary features**

Based on a variety of examples, I have shown, from the university level to central administration, that personal ties to their superiors and colleagues are key to cadres' careers. I have also stressed how diverse these ties are for cadres who rotate regularly from one position to the next. Throughout their professional trajectories, the cadres develop multilayered personal networks. In addition to existing familial, friendship or dorm-based relationships, student cadres develop multiple ties on campus, within student organizations but also with professors and university officials. This can include dyadic mentorship ties between students and officials. Many of such ties established by one official or a couple of officials, can eventually lead to mentorship chains, influencing several generations of students, or even structured clientelist networks dominating campus politics. Beyond universities, CYL officials develop relationships both inside and outside the organization. For CYL leaders in particular, the ties they build with their colleagues from other echelons of the organization through meetings and training programs are often rather weak. They are based on a diffuse common interest in the reputation of the organization rather than a direct hierarchical relation. As such they have little influence on each other's career. By contrast, the relationships built with CCP leaders at the different levels, which are in fact their superiors, are crucial for further advancement. Overall, the CYL leaders develop complex personal networks with a multitude of current and future CCP leaders.

Throughout their career, the cadres progressively broaden their network, which makes it harder to remain attached to a unique subgroup. Pieke in fact had such an intuition in his work on the Party schools training but did not expend much on it. According to him, "as they move up the hierarchy, cadres continue to be local cadres, rooted in their own native place, but the logic of promotion and job rotation expands, translates and co-opts their loyalties and attachments to more encompassing areas and larger communities of cadre-peers: promotion

quite literally expands cadres' horizons of their service to the party."<sup>238</sup> I argue that this is true beyond local identities. The multiple ties developed by cadres during their career imply a diversity of affiliations and attachments. In each personal case, the CYL affiliation cohabits with others groups and networks which could influence individuals in a variety of ways.

The multiplicity of personal allegiances highlights the segmentary features of the Party-State, which ends up being an overall network of personal networks. This is tied to the decentralized structure of the Chinese polity, and similar to what has been described in the case of other decentralized political parties.<sup>239</sup> As I stressed in the case of the CYL, at every level, the actual superior entity is not the upper level CYL but the local Party leaders, which goes against the creation of an overarching Youth League faction. Instead, it leads to the development of multiple clientelist relationships at the local level. These relationships form the base of the cadres' individual network, which they develop by transferring from one position or one locale, to another.

These various ties and attachments link cadres to one another but also make it harder for them to organize in cohesive groups. The uniqueness of every personal network, an outcome of the cadre's trajectory, contrasts with an organization based on separated and uniform sub-groups, which include a set gathering of actors. While they are imbricated, these personal networks never completely overlap, and cadres always have a diversity of personal allegiances. As a result, the cadres are not integrated in clearly defined primary groups, such as army regiments, which could be used as bases to organize against the broader group or to exit collectively.<sup>240</sup> Instead, the connected individuals have in common to be committed to their

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<sup>238</sup> Pieke, *The Good Communist: Elite Training and State Building in Today's China*, 160.

<sup>239</sup> Sawicki, *Les réseaux du Parti socialiste: sociologie d'un milieu partisan [The Socialist Party's networks]*, 27.

<sup>240</sup> See on this issue : Bearman, "Desertion as Localism: Army Unit Solidarity and Group Norms in the U.S. Civil War."

career within the system. While they might have competing personal goals, they have a common interest in the overall survival of the current political system as it is what guarantees their position. Loyalty to one's network and one's career leads to loyalty to the Party.

While Lieberthal and Oksenberg stressed how the fragmentary features of the Party-State are often inefficient in terms of policy implementation,<sup>241</sup> I argue that it leads to a variety of imbricated personal networks which contributes to holding the system together. Further studies could inquire in more details the implications of the segmentary features of the post-Mao Chinese system. While studies have underlined the decentralized nature of the Chinese polity,<sup>242</sup> none have analyzed the vast implications it has regarding cadre's careers and the system's cohesion, especially in terms of the imbrication between local and central level networks for a cadre rising in the hierarchy.

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<sup>241</sup> Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>242</sup> See in particular : Landry, *Decentralized Authoritarianism in China: The Communist Party's Control of Local Elites in the Post-Mao Era*.



## *I - My approach and its limits*

### **1) Comparisons across time and space**

To verify my hypotheses and put them in perspective, I have developed throughout the dissertation a comparative approach, across both time and space. The diachronic comparison encompasses the first years of the CYL, the Mao era and the post-Mao period. While it allows me to highlight continuities overtime, in particular regarding the structure of the CYL and the CCP's control over it, it also stresses transformations. These included changes in the Youth League's activities, in their framing, and therefore in the cadres' work. Comparison in time, more importantly, highlights how the CYL became a key promotion channel after the Cultural Revolution, by opposition to the Mao era. Overall, it shows that the CYL, far from an organizational remnant of the Maoist past, is a reinvented Leninist organizational weapon which becomes extremely important for the Party to attract young people and shape their political commitment in a situation in which it does not have the monopoly over social mobility anymore.

Comparison with other political systems also proved enlightening to my research. The macroscopic comparisons with the post-Stalin Soviet system and the Institutional Revolutionary Party regime in Mexico are particularly useful to highlight the specificity of the Chinese case. The post-Cultural revolution political context led to the development of a sponsored mobility system which contrasts with the elite renewal strategy developed by Khrushchev in the 1950s. In addition, the imbrication of the Party's youth organizations and higher education institutions in terms of political mobility contrasts with the independent recruitment role played by the universities themselves in the Mexican case. Micro level comparisons regarding the commitment-formation processes were also useful to draw parallels between the experience of young Chinese officials and what exists in other political parties,

including in electoral democracies such as France. Overall constant comparisons have enabled me to identify the specificities of the Chinese system as a whole but also to question the alleged uniqueness of the elements constituting it, as parallels are often easily found.

## 2) A State-centered approach

While my study combines three levels of analysis – a *micro* perspective focusing on the agents, a *meso* one taking the youth organization itself as a unit of analysis, and a *macro* approach regarding the transformations of the Chinese regime, it remains mainly centered on the Party-State, its institutions, and the effect they have on individuals. This is a conscious decision to limit my enquiry in order to get into the details of the mechanisms at play. Still, consequently, I only briefly touch upon a variety of related issues, in particular the instances of socialization and the personal relationships originating from outside the system.

At the individual level, I show that familial background, gender or friendship relationships affect the cadres' career in the Party-State. This is especially true during the first steps of the commitment-formation process. However, this is only a minor part of this study and, in particular, I do not develop in itself the issue of social class. Family background was a complicated topic to raise with my interviewees, who would fear to reveal their familial network and be accused of nepotism, and no overall data is available regarding student cadres or Party-State officials. Focusing on the personal ties and social role they developed through the Party-State institutions, I did not delve into the effect social origins might have in their choice or their ability to pursue a political career. Like in most political systems, privileged class status is largely a precondition to enter the political elite.<sup>243</sup> The literature on CCP recruitment stresses

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<sup>243</sup> Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*, 22.

how the Party now largely targets urban middle and upper class individuals.<sup>244</sup> Middle and upper class young people have better chances to go to college, where the recruitment and political commitment-building process generally starts. Also their aspirations and lifestyle is overall more aligned with the regime's objectives.<sup>245</sup> Conscious that my research only focuses on a specific portion of Chinese youth,<sup>246</sup> my goal is not to deny the importance of social class in political recruitment, but I focus rather on the next steps in terms of socialization. Even if the recruitment pool is limited to young people from certain social classes, we still have to understand how their political commitment is cultivated and how a very limited number of them eventually become part of the political elite.

At the level of the Party-State, I focus on the networks of officials which constitute the organization. However, these networks are not limited to institutional boundaries. The network of networks which constitute the Party-State is also what links it to society more broadly. The officials' personal networks I have described go beyond the limits of officialdom to include local family relationships, business ties etc. These networks have been described in the literature focusing on the relationship between State and society in China, either as local

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<sup>244</sup> Gore, *The Chinese Communist Party and China's Capitalist Revolution: The Political Impact of the Market*, 133; Dickson, "Who Wants to Be a Communist? Career Incentives and Mobilized Loyalty in China," 46.

<sup>245</sup> On the issue of the aspiration and values of the middle class and private businessmen, see : Tsai, *Capitalism without Democracy: The Private Sector in Contemporary China*; Jean-Louis Rocca, *The Making of the Chinese Middle Class. Small Prosperity, Great Expectations* (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

<sup>246</sup> On the other, and diverse, groups constituting Chinese youth, see in particular: Paul Clark, *Youth Culture in China: From Red Guards to Netizens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Alec Ash, *Wish Lanterns: Young Lives in New China* (London: Picador, 2016). On specific, marginalized, groups see in particular : Camille Salgues, "Ethnographie du fait scolaire chez les migrants ruraux à Shanghai [An ethnography of schooling among rural migrants in Shanghai]," *Politix*, no. 99 (2012): 129–52; Nathanel Amar, "Scream for Life. Usages politiques de la culture en Chine: échanges et résistance au sein de communautés alternatives. Le cas ses punks et des cinéastes indépendants. [Political Uses of Culture in China: Exchanges and Resistance in Alternative Communities. The Example of Punks and Independent Filmmakers]" (PhD dissertation, SciencesPo, 2015).

corporatism<sup>247</sup> or as symbiotic networks tying officials to businessmen.<sup>248</sup> The Party-State is therefore “multiplied,” to borrow Chevrier’s word, in the way it deals with society but also in how its agents are connected to each other, highlighting its segmentary features.<sup>249</sup> While my study is largely Party-State centered, it therefore echoes and completes what has been described more largely in the literature regarding State-society relations in post-Mao China: the ways in which the Party-State incorporates its recruits in its decentralized structure parallels its hegemonic, yet flexible and fragmented, control over the Chinese society.

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<sup>247</sup> Jean C Oi, “Fiscal Reform and Economic Foundations of Local State Corporatism in China,” *World Politics* 451 (1992): 99–126.

<sup>248</sup> David L Wank, *Commodifying Communism: Business, Trust, and Politics in a Chinese City* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>249</sup> Yves Chevrier, “L’État chinois entre formation et déformation [The Chinese State in-between Formation and Deformation],” *Revue Tiers Monde* 37, no. 147 (1996): 706.